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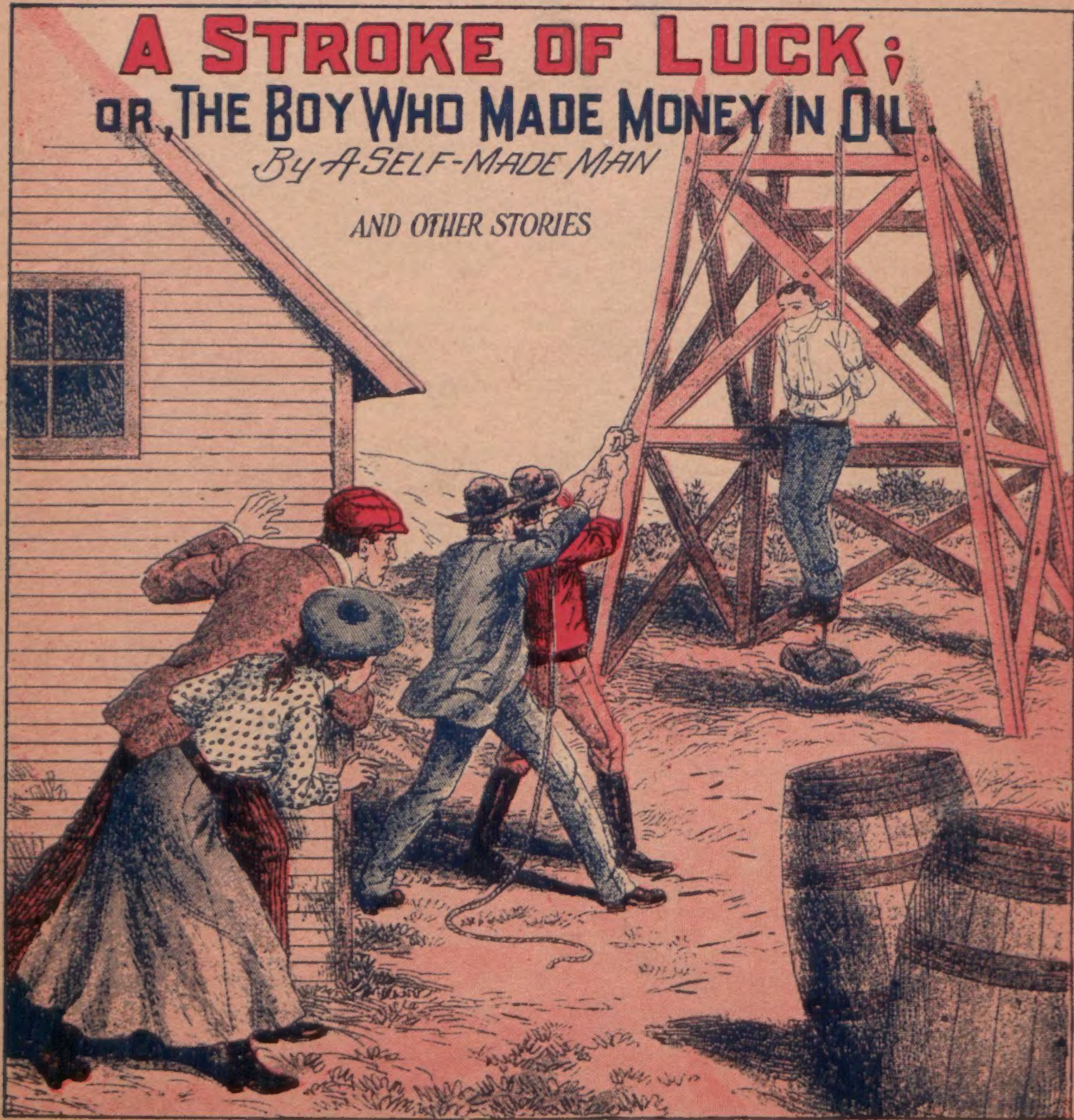
FAME AND FORTUNE WEEKLY.

STORIES OF BOYS WHO MAKE MONEY.

A STROKE OF LUCK; OR, THE BOY WHO MADE MONEY IN OIL.

By A SELF-MADE MAN

AND OTHER STORIES



"Now then, up with him!" cried Red O'Connor. He and Sandy hoisted the unfortunate Tom off his feet. At that moment Flynn and Jennie came upon the scene. "Run for help, Jennie," whispered Tim, and the girl darted away

FAME AND FORTUNE WEEKLY

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A STROKE OF LUCK

OR, THE BOY WHO MADE MONEY IN OIL

By A SELF-MADE MAN

CHAPTER I.—The Red Leather Pocketbook

"I seen it first!" snarled Chip Sadler, a disreputable looking youth who had acquired the sobriquet of "Chip" because he was a "chip of the old block"—that is, he was a miniature edition of his father, Sandy Sadler, a tough and reckless well-shooter of the district.

"You say you did, but I doubt it. At any rate, I got my hand on it first and possession is nine points of the law," replied Tom Cobb, a stalwart, good looking boy of eighteen.

The "it" in question was a red leather pocketbook which had been smothered in the dust of the country road.

The two boys, coming from opposite directions, had made a simultaneous swoop at it, and Tom Cobb's fingers snatched it from the wagon rut in which it lay.

"I've got the right to half what's in it," returned Chip, hedging on his first claim to the exclusive right to the whole find.

"A moment ago you wanted it all," chuckled Tom.

"I am willing to divide even," replied young Sadler, trying to look magnanimous, but there effort was a failure.

"Well, Chip, I don't think either of us has the right to anything that's in it."

"Why ain't we? We found it, didn't we?"

"No, we didn't," with an accent on the "we." "I found it and I am going to try and find the owner."

"You're going to try to find nothin'!" answered Chip, resentfully. "That's only an excuse to shake me so you can keep the hull of it. You can't make a fool out of me."

"I know it, Chip—Nature has done that already."

"What's that?" asked Chip suspiciously.

"Don't you understand English?"

"Think you're smart because you went to school longer than me," sneered Chip.

"Well, the more a fellow knows the smarter he is as a rule."

"I guess I know as much as you do if I didn't get it cut'n books."

"We won't argue that. Seeing that you were present when I found this wallet I'm going to allow you the right to see what's in it. Then I'm going to try and hunt up the owner as I said

before. If I can't find him then I will give you half of anything that's in it. That's fair, isn't it?"

"No, it ain't."

"Why not? The owner has a right to his property, hasn't he?"

"No, he ain't. Findin's keepin's."

"I don't agree with you."

"That's cause you mean to bluff me out of my share."

"That isn't the way I do business. If I find the owner I'll tell you who he is, and you can go and ask him if I returned his property to him. If I don't find him then you can claim half what the pocketbook contains."

"What's the use of goin' to all that trouble? You won't get no thanks. If I'd picked it up fust I'd give you half of it without any chinnin'."

"We'll see what's in it," said Tom, taking no notice of his companion's remark.

There were five brand-new \$100 bills in the wallet, and Chip's eyes devoured them greedily.

He had never seen so much money in all his life before.

It represented a fortune to him.

"Five hundred dollars," said Tom, after counting them. "That's quite a sum."

"And you're going to return all that to the owner?" said Chip in disgust.

"If I can find him."

"I don't believe you will try to find him. You're going to keep the money and cheat me out of my share."

"I'm going to do nothing of the sort."

"What else is in it besides that money?"

Tom looked through the flaps.

"There's some newspaper clippings, postage stamps, a small gold medal and—I guess that's all," he said, closing the pocketbook and putting the rubber band about it as he found it.

Chip, satisfied that Tom wasn't going to divide with him, made a sudden snatch for the wallet, grabbed it and took to his heels.

Tom made after him at once. The chase was a lively one for a minute or two, and then Chip, finding that he was sure to be overhauled, threw the pocketbook into the bushes.

Tom gave up the pursuit and rushed for the place where the wallet had disappeared. He had no difficulty in recovering it, and Chip watched him with malevolent gaze from a safe distance.

"I'll get square with you!" he shouted vengefully. Tom took no notice and walked off in the opposite direction. As he rounded a turn in the road about a quarter of a mile from the spot where he picked up the pocketbook he came upon a plainly dressed but very pretty girl of fifteen years whom he recognized as Jennie Dean.

She was gathering blackberries from the hedge where the bushes and fruit grew in profusion, and the pail by her side was nearly full.

"Hello, Jennie," said Tom, passing near her.

Tom had known Jennie for some time, and had taken a great shine to her.

"Why, Tom, is that you?" she replied with a pleased look that showed that she was delighted to see him.

"It isn't anybody else," he laughed. "Glad to see me?"

"I'm always glad to see you, Tom," she replied earnestly.

"Are you? Thanks. I can say the same for myself. You're the only girl in the county I care a cent for."

Jennie blushed a little and began picking more berries.

"Shall I help you?" he continued.

"I'm nearly done, but you can help if you wish to."

"All right. I like to make myself useful. I see you've been careless. There are a lot of berries in the dust."

"Chip Sadler upset my can when I had it half full," she replied.

"He did, eh? It's just like him to do such a mean trick. I met him down the road and almost had a run-in with him."

"About what?" asked the girl curiously.

"About a pocketbook we both saw in the dust. I got my hands on it first and he was as mad as a hornet."

"You found a pocketbook?" Jennie ejaculated in surprise.

"Yes, here it is," and Tom showed it to her.

When he opened it and showed her the five new \$100 bills she uttered another exclamation.

"What a lot of money!" she cried.

"Five hundred dollars."

"What are you going to do with it? I suppose it's yours now."

"No. I'm going to make every effort to find the owner. If I fail I shall divide the money with Chip."

"Do you really mean to give him half of the money? He's no friend of yours. I know he hates you, and would injure you if he could."

"Well, I think he has as much to half of the money as I have. At any rate I promised to give it to him in case I couldn't find the owner."

Jennie, after a little further conversation, finished her berry picking and she and Tom, the latter carrying the pail, set out for the house owned by Mrs. Dean, which had also been Tom's home for a year.

pany's property. Tom Flynn, the boss driller, took a great liking for the boy, and kept him pretty steadily employed. The work of the crew was not confined to the Lucinda property. Flynn took his hands around to the different claims wherever they were to be found.

The Lucinda at present was the most important and best paying investment in the field, having four wells spouting continuously. It was said that the stockholders were receiving 250 per cent returns on their stock annually. Originally the stock sold for ten cents a share. Now none of it was on the market though there were standing offers of \$15 a share.

Therefore, those who had invested \$100 in that stock two years since at ten cents a share were now receiving \$2,500 per year in dividends, and their stock was worth \$15,000. Of course not all the oil properties were doing anywhere near as well as the Lucinda, but those just starting were making capital out of the Lucinda's success. There was no saying but all the companies might do as well, or pretty near as well, as the Lucinda, for their claims surrounded the property on all sides.

Mrs. Dean's little farm, where Tom lived, was on the edge of the surveyed oil fields, and it was not improbable that there was oil several hundred feet below the surface.

Since the first rush about two years before, several offers had been made to her to sign an oil lease which would give the lessee the right to bore anywhere on the ground as his judgment dictated.

Under the terms of the lease, if oil was not found on her property she was to receive nothing.

If, on the contrary, oil was found, she was entitled to one-eighth of all that came up.

Owing to the uncertainty of results and the certainty of much damage and inconvenience from the presence of the well borers, she turned the offers down.

The farm adjoining hers belonged to an old man of seventy, who was something of a hermit. He had allowed the property to go to ruin, and only cultivated enough of the ground near his house to give him a living.

He had leased his oil rights to a company for a term of two years, with privilege of renewal.

The company had exhausted its capital in fruitless borings, only one of which gave any promise of success.

Over this had been erected a derrick, but for one reason or another it proved a failure.

The failure to reach oil on the old man's ground caused a cessation of any further offers to Mrs. Dean or other farm owners on that side of the oil fields.

On the morning that Tom Cobb found the pocketbook in the road he was not working, the crew having finished their labors on a new well the afternoon before.

He had been over to get his wages to date from Flynn and to find out when his services would be required again.

When he and Jennie reached home they found dinner almost ready, a fact that suited the boy immensely, for he had a healthy appetite which always asserted itself about twelve o'clock.

He showed the wallet and the money it con-

CHAPTER II.—A Few Remarks About the California Oil Fields.

Tom Cobb was an orphan who had drifted to the oil fields of central California and got work with a well-boring crew on the Lucinda Oil Com-

tained to Mrs. Dean, and she was surprised at what she called his luck.

"Better say the luck is the owner's if I should be so fortunate as to find him. He'll get his property back intact," replied Tom.

"Well the man to whom the money belongs, should you find him, ought to reward you liberally for returning him his pocketbook," she said.

"If he offers to do it I won't turn his proposal down. Small favors are always thankfully received," laughed Tom.

"He ought to give you \$50."

"If he should be as liberal as that I know what I would do with my half of it."

"Your half of it? Why, it would all be yours."

"No it wouldn't half of any reward would belong to Chip Sadler."

"Chip Sadler!" exclaimed Mrs. Dean.

"Yes, we practically found the wallet together, only I got possession of it. He wanted me to divide the \$500 with him, but I couldn't see it. I promised to give him half of it if I didn't find the owner, and of course, he will be entitled to half of any reward I might get. My word is as good as my bond."

"It seems a shame that he should get half of any money that you may get," said Mrs. Dean. "He is the worst boy in the neighborhood and his father has an equally bad reputation."

"Well, it can't be helped," replied Tom.

The foregoing conversation had taken place in the kitchen, where Mrs. Dean was busy getting dinner, and Jennie was occasionally helping her.

Tom went upstairs and stowed the wallet at the bottom of the trunk and tidied himself up a bit for the table.

CHAPTER III.—Tom Finds the Owner of the Pocketbook.

After dinner Tom left the farm with the intention of trying to get a clue to the owner of the red leather pocketbook.

As he passed out of the gate into the road he saw Ephraim Willett the old recluse who owned the adjoining farm, coming toward him. His head was down and he was tramping along slowly and dejectedly. The boy had done him a favor some months since, and the hermit after that always nodded or spoke to him when they happened to meet.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Willett," said Tom as the old man came up.

The hermit looked up and nodded at the lad. As he was passing he stopped suddenly and caught Tom by the arm.

"Are you going up the road?" he asked in an eager way.

"Yes," replied Tom. "I'm going as far as the Visalia road."

"Will you do me a favor?"

"Certainly."

"I have suffered a great loss. Somewhere between here and the Visalia road I lost my pocketbook this morning. I've been over the ground for the last two hours, but my eyesight is poor and I can't see very well. I wish you would look carefully for it, and if you find it, I will give you one of the \$100 bills it contains."

"What kind of a pocketbook and how much money was in it?"

"It was an old red leather pocketbook and it contained five new \$100 bills."

"And an old-fashioned gold medal?"

"How did you know that?" asked the old man, looking at Tom sharply.

"Because I found your pocketbook in the road about two hours ago. There was no clue to the owner and was just going to make a tour around the oil district to see if I could not find the person who lost it. You have described it so accurately that I am satisfied it is the one you say you lost," replied Tom.

"You found it?" cried the old man eagerly. "Where is it? Have you got it in your pocket?"

"No; it is in my trunk at the house. Come with me and you shall have it at once," replied Tom.

The hermit followed him up the path to the front porch, but would not enter the house. "I'll wait here," he said, seating himself on the steps. Tom ran to his room, got the wallet out of his trunk and brought it to the old man.

"Is that your wallet?" he asked him.

"Yes, yes; that's it. Tell me how you found it."

Tom explained all the circumstances, including Chip Sadler's participation in the affair.

"You are an honest boy—an honest boy," said the hermit after he had looked through the wallet and found everything intact. "I will reward you."

He offered Tom one of the \$100 bills.

"I'd rather not take so much from you, sir," said Tom.

"You deserve it. Had anyone else found it I might never have got it back. Take the money."

"No, replied the boy, 'I won't take so much. I've got to give half of it to Chip Sadler, and I'd rather not be obliged to hand him \$50 of your good money. Ten dollars is enough to squander on that chap, so if you insist on giving me something don't make it over \$20.'"

At length the recluse turned to Tom.

"Here's \$10. Divide it with Sandy Sadler's son. It would be foolish to give him any more. But I sha'n't forget you, Tom Cobb—no, no, I sha'n't forget you."

"Thank you, Mr. Willett," replied Tom, putting the bill in his pocket. At that moment the front gate slammed and the boy saw Red O'Connor, a well-shooter, and crony of Sandy Sadler, advancing up the walk.

Tom was greatly surprised to see O'Connor making a call at the Dean farm.

He had never done so before, and the boy could not imagine what business had brought him.

"Hello, Tom Cobb," he said coming to a stop in front of the hermit and the boy.

"Good afternoon, Mr. O'Connor," replied Tom.

"Did you call to see Mrs. Dean?"

"No, I called to see you."

"Me?" ejaculated Tom, wondering what the well-shooter wanted with him.

"I lost a red leather pocketbook in the road this morning, containing five new \$100 bills. I heard you found it, so I came after it," said O'Connor.

Tom was paralyzed at his words.

"Who told you that I found a red leather pocketbook this morning?" he asked.

"No matter who told me. I heard you did, and I want it."

"Sorry, Mr. O'Connor, but I'm afraid you've

made some mistake about that wallet being yours."

"There ain't no mistake about it. The pocket-book is mine."

"It has been claimed by another person, and as he described it exactly and what it contained I judged he was the rightful owner and gave it to him," replied Tom.

"What! You gave my pocketbook to somebody else."

"I didn't say I gave your pocket book to anybody. I said I gave up the one I found in the road this morning."

"Well, that was mine."

"The person proved his right to it."

"I don't care what he proved, it was mine."

"You say you lost a red leather pocketbook?"

"I did."

"In the road?"

"Yes."

"What did the pocketbook contain?"

"Five new \$100 bills, some newspaper clippings, and a gold medal."

Tom could not but admit that O'Connor had described the contents exactly, but when the old hermit, who was listening impassively to the conversation, had been equally explicit.

Tom was satisfied that Ephraim Willett was the rightful owner of the wallet, but he couldn't understand how O'Connor was able to tell what was in it with such exactness.

While he was puzzling over the extraordinary circumstance the explanation suddenly burst upon his mind.

He remembered he had shown Chip Sadler what the pocketbook contained.

Evidently that young chap had passed the information on to O'Connor, maybe through his father, and the scheme had been cooked up between the three by which they hoped to get the wallet in their possession and divide the spoils.

"Are you going to hand over that pocketbook or ain't you?" said Red O'Connor impatiently.

"I told you that I gave it to the man who claimed it and proved that it was his."

"Who was he?"

"Mr. Willett here," said Tom, indicating the hermit.

"O'Connor was clearly disconcerted by this statement.

He looked at the hermit, who paid very little attention to him.

"Did you lose a red leather pocketbook, too," he growled at length.

"I did, and this boy found it in the road and returned it to me."

Mr. Willett drew the contested wallet from his pocket and held it up.

"Is this the pocketbook you lay claim to?" he added.

"It looks like the one I lost," replied O'Connor sulkily.

"We'll settle it right here, then," said the hermit, opening the wallet. "You say there was \$500 in new bills, a gold medal and some newspaper clippings in your pocketbook?"

"Yes."

"That's a remarkable coincidence, for mine contains the same," he said, with a tinge of sarcasm in his voice. "Now we will see whether this pocketbook really belongs to you or to me. You will, of course, be able to tell what the clippings are, and give some kind of a description of the medal.

What kind of gold medal was yours? Was it round, square or oblong? Was there a figure on both sides, and what words were stamped on it?"

"I don't remember nothin' about it," replied O'Connor in a surly tone.

"But you must remember something as to the nature of the clippings. What do they refer to?"

"Oil wells," hazarded the well-shooter.

"These clippings are not about oil at all. They refer to books on scientific subjects. Look at them."

Red O'Connor declined to examine them, and muttering something about having made a mistake he turned on his heel and went away.

"He didn't lose any pocketbook," said Tom. "I made the mistake of showing the contents of the wallet to Chip Sadler. He told his father, probably, and Sadler and O'Connor made up the scheme to get the wallet from me. It is fortunate I met you as soon as I did, and thus was able to block their little game."

Tom walked to the gate with Mr. Willett, who again assured him that he wouldn't forget his honesty in returning his wallet with the contents intact, and then started up the road to call on Tim Flynn, the boss driller, at his house.

CHAPTER IV.—Tom Puts Two Rascals to Rout.

Several days passed before Tom ran across Chip Sadler again, and then he stopped him.

"I found the owner of the pocketbook and returned it to him. He gave me \$10. I consider you are entitled to half of it, so here it is."

Tom held a \$5 bill out to Chip. The youth, who had heard the particulars of the return of the pocketbook to Ephraim Willett, grabbed the money eagerly.

It was a surprise to him, for he had not expected to receive anything, even if Tom received a reward.

He judged Tom by himself.

"He gave you \$10 for giving it back," he said, gloating over the bill and mentally figuring how he would spend it on himself.

"Yes."

"He ought to have given you more; but it's just like him—a mean old hulk. It's a wonder he gave you anything. Must have broke his heart to cough up ten. Bet yer life he wouldn't have got it from me if he hadn't anteed up one of them \$100 bills."

A week passed and then Tim Flynn got another contract to bore a well on the Jumbo Gas Company's property, and Tom went to work again.

On Saturday evening he went to town and bought the summer dress he had his eyes on, which had been reduced to \$8. It was for Jennie.

It was late in the evening when he made his way back home. The wind sighed through the leaves and branches of the trees in a melancholy way. It looked more like a March night than a July one. In fact, the only thing that savored of summer was the warmth of the air.

As he was on good terms with the old hermit, Tom ventured to take a short cut across his property.

He saw a light shining in a lower window of

Willett's house which told him that the old man had not yet retired to rest.

As he approached the building he suddenly heard a cry for help which sounded like the hermit's voice.

Tom ran forward, and laying the pasteboard box containing the dress he had purchased for Jennie under a convenient tree, he dashed for the house just as a second cry, with a despairing ring to it, reached his ears. He laid his hand on the handle of the nearest door, expecting to find it locked, but it wasn't and he entered the building.

He found himself in a dark hallway, but a light shining above the sill guided him to the door, which he hastily opened. Then he saw a sight that took away his breath.

Two men, with their faces half hidden by towels, but whose general appearance left little doubt in his mind that they were Sandy Sadler and Red O'Connor, had Mr. Willett down on the floor and were tying him.

"Here! What in thunder are you chaps doing?" cried Tom, rushing into the room.

The rascals sprang to their feet in a startled way and looked at the boy. Tom snatched a small club from the table which looked as if it had been used on the recluse's head and shouted: "Get out of here, both of you!"

He swung it at the head of one of the men.

The fellow, whom Tom believed to be Sandy Sadler, dodged and backed away.

"It's Tom Cobb," hissed the other in the unmistakable tones of Red O'Connor. "We must down him, or the jig will be up with us."

The speaker rushed at the boy, and Tom smashed him on the arm with the club and then jumped aside to keep him from closing.

"Help me, Sandy!" cried O'Connor, in a furious tone. Sadler made a spring at Tom, but the boy put the table between him and the men.

A slight pause ensued in the hostilities, and Tom availed himself of it to pull the table toward the door so as to offset a flank movement on the part of either of the rascals.

One of the table legs caught in a tear of the old carpet and the table pitched toward Tom. A drawer shot out and hung suspended in the act of falling. Tom grabbed it and pushed it back. As he did so, his eyes rested on a Colt's revolver the old hermit kept to protect himself with. As the rascals recovered their nerves and dashed simultaneously at the boy, Tom snatched the revolver out of the drawer, cocked it and covered them both with it. They stopped in dismay within two feet of the table.

"Don't shoot," cried Sadler in wavering tones. "Don't shoot, for Heaven's sake!"

O'Connor said nothing, but was clearly intimidated.

"Release Mr. Willett this moment or I'll put a ball into each of you," said the boy in a resolute tone. "Do as I say," he added, as they hesitated.

Sadler got down on his hands and knees and with trembling fingers proceeded to untie the knots of the cord they had put around the man's body.

"I know both of you scoundrels," said Tom, "in spite of the towels about your faces. Remove that gag, Red O'Connor, or there'll be something doing you won't like."

With an imprecation the man reluctantly obeyed.

"Now get back against that wall," continued Tom to O'Connor.

"We'll fix you for this," hissed Red.

At that moment a new person appeared on the scene behind Tom. It was Chip Sadler. The rascals saw him, though Tom didn't.

"Grab him, Chip, quick—quick," cried O'Connor, starting forward. Tom whirled around as he heard Chip's step in his rear. The young rascal however, caught the arm that held the weapon.

In the struggle that took place the revolver went off and Chip uttered a scream of pain, and, letting go of Tom, sank to the floor shrieking, "I'm shot! I'm shot!"

The bullet had entered the calf of his leg, and he writhed on the carpet in pain and terror.

O'Connor was almost upon him, when Tom, staggering back, fired at him. The ball made a flesh wound in his side, and he uttered a roar. Tom got outside the door into the hall and covered Sadler, who had followed Red. The well-shooter dropped to the floor to save himself, thinking the boy intended to shoot him.

O'Connor raised the table to throw it at Tom in his desperation, and the boy shot at him again. He could easily have plugged the man in the chest, but did not want to do so. He aimed for his arm, but the bullet went between his arm and his body. Then the table came through the air at Tom, but struck the side of the doorway and fell with a crash.

Sadler had seized the chance to throw up a window and jump out. O'Connor, finding himself at Tom's mercy and deserted by his associate, made a dash for a door which communicated with another room, and getting through it in safety, made his escape from the house by the kitchen door, leaving Tom master of the situation.

CHAPTER V.—Tom Becomes Owner of the Willett Farm

Tom, without paying any attention to the blubbing Chip, who lay near the door, ran to the hermit, whom he found conscious, but very weak.

"You have saved my life, Tom Cobb," he said in a fluttering voice. "Help me up."

Tom raised him into a chair. "You are bleeding from a wound in the head, Mr. Willett," said the boy. "Are you much hurt?"

"I don't know. I feel badly."

Tom looked at the hurt and saw that it did not appear to be a deep one.

"I guess it's only a scalp cut," he said. "I'll bathe and do it up for you."

He seized the lamp from the mantel, and, holding the revolver in readiness for instant use, entered the back room.

No one was there. Then he proceeded to the kitchen, where he found the door open, and concluded that Red O'Connor had left the house that way. He shut and locked the door, then got some water and a towel and returned to the sitting room. He bathed the hermit's wound as best as he could, and bound his head up with a towel.

"Do you feel better now?" he asked the old

man and received an affirmative reply, though Mr. Willett looked white and nerveless.

Tom went over to the door to get the table and found that Chip Sadler had managed to make himself scarce. He walked outside and looked around, but saw no sign of the youth. He brought the box containing the dress into the house and tried to lock the door but found that it had been forced by an implement which broke the lock.

He carried the table out and placed it against it, though he knew it was but a poor protection.

"Shall I help you to bed?" he asked the hermit.

"Yes, please," answered the old man.

He assisted Mr. Willett to his bedroom on the next floor, got his clothes off and helped him into bed.

"I'm afraid I'm done for, Tom Cobb," said the recluse. "The shock has weakened me greatly. I am not very strong anyway. I think you had better get a doctor for me."

"I'll do it. I'll go to the office of the Atlas Oil Company near by and telephone to town," said Tom. "You ought to have some kind of a stimulant before I leave you. Have you anything of that kind in the house?"

"There is a bottle of brandy in the cupboard. You may give me some."

Tom found a small glass beside the bottle and filled it with the cognac. The old man sipped it, and then said he felt a bit revived. After finding that he could be of no further use for the present Tom left the house with his bundle, for he had to pass Mrs. Dean's property to reach the office of the Atlas Oil Company.

He found Jennie and her mother still up, and laying the box in a corner, gave them a hasty outline of what had happened at the Willett property. They were greatly astonished, while Jennie turned pale at the thought of the risk Tom had faced.

"I suppose I ought to go over and stay with the old gentleman," said Mrs. Dean. "At any rate, until you get back, for he seems to be in a bad way."

"It would be well if you did so," replied Tom, with his hand on the door. "You will find the front door unlocked. His room is on the first floor, in front, on the left side of the landing."

"I'll do it," she replied rising to get ready. Tom then hurried off, and inside of ten minutes was banging at the door of the office of the Atlas Oil Company, which was in charge of a night watchman.

"Hello. What do you want?" asked the watchman, thrusting his head out of one of the windows.

"Say, will you telephone to some doctor in town to come out and see Ephraim Willett?" asked Tom.

"The hermit?"

"Yes. He was attacked by a couple of scoundrels tonight and nearly knocked out. He's pretty bad, for the shock has been hard on him."

"I'll do it," replied the watchman.

"Get any doctor you can reach. I'm going back to the house to stay with him."

Tom rushed back the way he came and stopped at his own home to find out if Mrs. Dean had gone over to the Willett place. Jennie told him that she had taken some remedies and things with

her. Tom didn't wait to say anything more, but hastened to the hermit's house, where he found Mrs. Dean by the old man's bedside.

"How is he?" the boy asked.

"He seems to be in a stupor. I've fixed up his head with some balsam and a fresh bandage," she replied.

"I got the watchman of the Atlas Company to telephone for a doctor, and I suppose we may expect one before long."

Tom then gave Mrs. Dean a more detailed account of the trouble in the room below.

"I knew Sadler and O'Connor were pretty hard characters, but I did not imagine they would do anything quite as bad as this. They evidently came to rob Mr. Willett, for he has the reputation of being something of a miser."

"The \$500 he had in the pocketbook I found probably tempted them. No doubt they believed that was only a small part of the money he had in the house," replied Tom.

The doctor came inside of an hour and he looked the old man over. Tom told how Mr. Willett had been hurt. He examined the wound. "He is not seriously hurt so far as the injury to his head is concerned, but I am afraid the shock has been a bad one to a man of his years," he said.

"I suppose he'll pull through all right. Don't you think he will?" said Tom.

"If he were younger and stronger I should unhesitatingly say yes; but in his case I would not like to venture a positive opinion. He may or may not. It all depends on his vitality. I should judge him to be a man of close on to seventy at least."

"I believe that's about his age." The doctor left some medicine, some directions, and promising to return some time in the forenoon of the next day, and took his leave.

"You had better go home, Mrs. Dean. I'll stay with him all night. You send Jennie over in the morning with some breakfast for me, or you can come yourself and let me go to breakfast," said Tom.

"I'll come over," she said, and took her departure.

Mr. Willett remained in a stupor for some hours, but along toward sunrise he brightened up and talked with Tom.

"You're a good boy, Tom Cobb, and I sha'n't forget what you have done for me. Should I die, you shall have all I own, for I haven't a single relative in the world to give it to."

"I hope you won't die, Mr. Willett. The doctor said the wound on your head did not amount to a whole lot."

"One at my age never can tell how long his span of life will last. I've passed the allotted three score years and ten, which is more than most men can ever say, and can hardly expect to live much longer under the most favorable conditions."

The old man ceased speaking, and presently dropped into a doze. Shortly afterward the day broke and before long the sun rose. The hermit was conscious when Mrs. Dean arrived about eight o'clock.

"After you have had your breakfast, Tom, lie down and sleep. Jennie will soon be over to keep me company. She will return to get dinner ready, and will awaken you when she thinks it is time," said Mrs. Dean.

Tom went home, ate his breakfast and turned in for a few hours of sleep. The doctor called on his old patient about eleven and said he was getting on as well as could be expected. Two policemen appeared at the farmhouse while the doctor was still there. Mrs. Dean told them all the facts of the case. They then left to find and arrest the two rascals. Sandy Sadler and Red O'Connor, however, knowing that Tom Cobb would give them away, had gone into hiding somewhere in the neighborhood, and the officers were unable to locate them. Tim Flynn called at the Dean home about half-past twelve, while Jennie was preparing dinner, and asked for Tom.

"He's up in his room asleep," replied Jennie. "He's been up all night, staying with old Mr. Willett, on the next farm, who was attacked by Sandy Sadler and Red O'Connor last night and badly hurt."

"What did they attack him for?" asked Flynn.

"The supposition is they went there to rob him. At any rate, Tom happened to come along by the house in time to rescue him after they had him bound. But I'll call Tom now, for dinner is nearly ready, and you can hear the story from him."

"You needn't go up. I'll wake him myself."

So Flynn went upstairs and, entering Tom's room, shook him lustily. The boy started bolt upright, waved his arms and shouted:

"Keep off, you rascals, or I'll fill you full of — Why, hello, Mr. Flynn, is that you? I thought —"

"You were scrapping with Sadler and O'Connor, eh?" laughed the boss driller.

"Why, yes; I was dreaming that they were coming at me, and I was just about to fire when —"

"You woke up and found me with my hand on your shoulder. Ha, ha, ha! The joke is on you, my lad."

"I guess it is. When did you come?"

"About ten or fifteen minutes ago. Just dropped around to give you a call."

"Well, I'll get up."

"And while you're dressing yourself you might tell me the particulars of the scrap you had last night with Sandy and Red over at Willett's house. Jennie told me that those two rascals went there to rob the hermit and nearly killed him."

"There's no certainty that he won't die yet from the shock. It was a blamed shame the way they used the old man—the cowards! Struck him down unawares with a club. But the police will put them out of harm's way in a day or two, and they're sure to spend some years behind the bars. If Mr. Willett should die, they are liable to swing for their crime, and I wouldn't feel a bit sorry for them."

Then he told Flynn the full particulars of his night's adventure. Tom and Flynn then went downstairs to find dinner ready.

"You'll eat with us, Mr. Flynn," said Tom.

"Much obliged for the invitation, but I had my dinner before I came over."

After the meal Flynn went over to the Willett house with Tom and saw the old hermit. He stayed awhile with the boy and then went home. Mr. Willett improved during the day, and next morning he was able to get up. But he wasn't the same man he had been, and inside of two

weeks announced his intention of going to Los Angeles.

"I don't expect to come back, Tom," he said to the boy, "so I'm going to give you this farm of mine, which you can sell or keep, as it suits you. As you can't hold realty in your own name I'll transfer it to Mrs. Dean in trust for you."

Three days afterward he bade Tom and the Deans goodby and departed.

CHAPTER VI.—In the Hands of the Enemy.

Although Tom was now owner of the Willett farm, including the house and all its furniture, he had no particular use for it. He locked the house up and barricaded the windows, after removing a part of the furniture to Mrs. Dean's house. Tom continued to work for Tim Flynn, and every day he picked up more information about the oil industry, and grew more interested in the future of the fields.

"What are you thinking about, Tom?" asked Jennie one evening in October when they were sitting together in the living-room.

"I was thinking of several things. I was wondering, for one thing, where Red O'Connor and Sandy Sadler skipped out to. The police weren't able to find them."

"They left the county at once or they must have been caught," she replied.

"I suppose so. Maybe they went to Los Angeles or 'Frisco."

"You were very good to Chip Sadler to tell the authorities that he was mixed up in that affair," said Jennie. "He was laid up at his home for some time with his leg and could easily have been arrested. I haven't heard that he was particularly grateful to you, for he's just as impudent as ever to me."

"I didn't care to give him away, though I had no great sympathy for him. Still, on account of his mother I held my tongue," replied Tom. "Another thing I was thinking of," he added, "and that is whether there is any oil deep down under the Willett farm, and under your mother's as well. It is true that the El Capitan Oil Company, which acquired a two-year's lease from Mr. Willett, made a dozen-odd borings without result; but it struck me that they didn't go deep enough. It seems funny that the line drawn by the county road should cut the Willett farm, and presumably all the other property on this side of it, off from the oil field. Of course the oil must end somewhere, but still I'm not satisfied that there is no oil in my ground. I've talked to Mr. Flynn about it, and he has promised to look into the boring where the derrick is at the first chance. If I had the money to pay for the labor I'd think about having that hole continued further down. There's a fortune in oil, and I'd like to have a share of it."

"It would be just splendid if oil was found on your place," said Jennie with sparkling eyes.

"Would you be real glad, Jennie?"

"You know I would. I want to see you get up in the world."

"I really believe you have some interest in me."

"Of course I have. Why shouldn't I?"

"I'm glad to hear it. Well, if oil was discov-

ered on my property, why shouldn't it be on your mother's too?"

"It would seem as if it should."

"The Willett farm is no good to me as it stands. There's no money in farming, anyway, and if there was I haven't any liking for the occupation. I'm thoroughly interested in the oil industry. If I had the money to spare I'd buy stock in the new Jumbo Oil Company, where I am working. It is selling at 25 cents. Six months from now it may be selling for ten to twenty times that price. Look at the Lucinda, the promotion stock of which sold at from ten cents to twenty-five cents a share. They say it is worth fifteen dollars now, and you couldn't get it at that because of the big monthly dividends paid on it. Why, Jim Butler, the manager, draws \$25,000 a year out of it, besides his salary, and the president and some of the other officers get more than that. It makes a fellow's mouth water to think of the money that's in oil."

Tom's thoughts were undoubtedly wrapt up in oil. When talking with Flynn the subject was nearly always oil, and latterly about the possibility of the presence of the fluid on the Willett farm, as he had always called the property. He had even dreamed of oil, but it was usually in connection with the farm.

He had visions of unlimited wealth within his grasp, and saw himself as a second Monte Cristo, but only to awake in the morning to find himself still just a common well-borer.

"Will I ever realize the dream of my life?" he asked himself a score of times, as he gazed in the direction of the towering derricks of the Lucinda claim.

On Sundays and on days when he was not busy with Flynn he would stalk around the Willett farm, looking at the abandoned holes, left by the El Capitan people, and wonder if they really represented a fruitless hope.

The hole at the derrick always attracted him particularly because he had heard that the report had once gone out that oil had been struck there.

The rumor was evidently premature, since nothing had come of it.

One fine morning early in November Tom was standing by the derrick dreaming castles in the air, when he heard footsteps behind him. He turned his head lazily and found himself face to face with the last two men on earth he expected to see in that neighborhood again—Red O'Connor and Sandy Sadler.

They seemed to enjoy the surprise their presence had given him.

"Well, Tom Cobb, we meet again," said O'Connor with an ugly grin.

"You two have nerve to show yourselves in this vicinity after what you have done," replied the young well-borer.

"Nerve is our strong point," chuckled Sadler.

"Is it? You didn't show any superabundance of it the night I had you under Mr. Willett's revolver. You skipped and left your partner to face the music alone. If I were you I wouldn't talk about your nerve."

"I don't want to hear any of your back talk," replied Sadler crustily.

"No, chaps of your stamp don't like to hear the truth."

"You spoiled our job that night, Tom Cobb," said O'Connor, "and we've had it in for you ever

since. I think I told you we'd get square with you, and that is what we propose to do now."

The speaker's attitude and words were menacing and Tom began to feel uneasy.

As far as he knew he was alone on the property, and the derrick was some distance even from the house, and that was locked up.

Either of these rascals was physically more than a match for him, while both together would surely have him dead to rights if they laid their hands on him.

Flight was his only chance to save himself, and he was satisfied he could outrun them. He turned quickly and made a dash for the road. The dash, however, was nipped in the bud by the hole under the derrick. One of his legs slipped into it and down he went on his face. Before he could get up the rascals were upon him and had pinned him to the ground helpless.

"So you thought you would give us leg bail, eh?" said O'Connor with a short, wicked laugh. "That's where you slipped up. Get a rope out of the shed yonder, Sadler and we'll fix this smart aleck for keeps."

O'Connor sat on Tom and held him down while Sadler went for the rope. Sadler returned in a couple of minutes with several short pieces of rope, with which the rascals proceeded to bind him securely.

They propped him up against the derrick and surveyed him with every evidence of satisfaction.

Tom wondered what they were going to do with him.

"Sandy, take his handkerchief out of his pocket and gag him. I don't know that any one would hear him anyway, if he yelled, but it is best to be on the safe side," said O'Connor.

Accordingly Sadler gagged Tom in no very gentle way. Then the two rascals lit their pipes, and, walking a few feet away, began to figure on the best way to settle their score with the boy. A long rope hanging from the top of the derrick was flapping against the side of the structure.

The moment O'Connor spied it he grinned sardonically. "See that rope, Sandy?" he said.

"I'd be blind if I didn't," replied his companion.

"We'll tie a nice heavy stone around Cobb's legs so as to steady them, then we'll hoist him up near the top of the derrick and leave him to swing there until somebody comes this way and lets him down," said O'Connor.

"S'pose nobody comes?"

"Then he'll swing till we come back to-morrow and let him go."

"Suppose the rope should break?"

"Then he'd come down with a run."

"And break his neck?"

"Well, what do we care?"

"It would be murder."

"No, it would be an accident."

Sandy, after some hesitation, agreed to help put the plan through, so O'Connor climbed up the derrick and freed the rope.

Then he tested it to see how strong it was.

Finding that it appeared to be solid enough to sustain his own weight, he had no doubt it would hold the boy twenty-four hours easily enough.

A stone of some weight was securely tied to Tom's feet, then the end of the derrick rope

was made fast to the boy's arms, and were tied behind his back.

"We're going to give you a rise in the world," chuckled O'Connor.

"Yes, we're going to h'ist you up to the top of the derrick and leave you there for the crows to look at," put in Sadler.

"You'll have a fine and uninterrupted view of the farm as you swing around back and forth," grinned O'Connor.

"Plenty of fresh air to feast your lungs on," said Sadler.

While they were speaking two forms appeared behind the barn coming toward the derrick.

They were Tom Flynn and Jennie Dean. The barn being between them and the derrick they did not see what was going on. Neither did Tom nor the two rascals observe their approach.

"You might as well say your prayers while you are up there, for if the rope breaks we won't be responsible for the consequences," said O'Connor.

"Hope you had a good breakfast, for you won't get nothing to eat for some time," chipped in Sadler.

Evidently they enjoyed the satisfaction of tantalizing him—playing with him like a cat does with a mouse.

"That stone hanging to your feet is likely to get heavier, the longer you are up there," chuckled O'Connor.

"Perhaps the crows will peck it loose from you," haw-hawed Sadler.

At length they tired of further talk.

He and Sandy hoisted the unfortunate Tom off his feet.

At that moment Flynn and Jennie came upon the scene.

"Run for help, Jennie," whispered Flynn, and the girl darted away.

CHAPTER VII.—Out of One Trouble and Into Another

Flynn watched, from the shadow of the barn, O'Connor and Sadler hoist Tom Cobb up inside the derrick until they had raised him almost as high as the rope would permit, when they made the end of the rope fast to one of the uprights.

It was not without considerable astonishment he had recognized the two rascals.

He would have dashed in single-handed to the rescue of Tom when he first saw what the two scoundrels were about, only he was afraid that both would drop the rope to defend themselves and Tom might get an ugly fall.

O'Connor and Sadler, after addressing some ironical remarks to the suspended boy, and poking fun at his helpless situation, put their pipes in their pockets and walked away. Flynn took care to slip around the barn and to keep the building between himself and them. As soon as they got over the fence into the adjacent lane and disappeared from view Flynn walked to the derrick, unloosened the rope and lowered Tom carefully to the ground.

"Those rascals had you in a nice fix, Tom," said the boss driller as he removed the gag from the boy's mouth.

"Thanks, Mr. Flynn. You didn't reach these diggings a moment too soon. That stone those villains tied to my feet made me so heavy that the rope almost pulled my arms out of joint. The torture of hanging up there for even an hour I believe would have driven me out of my head. I don't believe they could have realized the ordeal they were putting me through or they wouldn't have walked off and left me to my fate."

"They didn't care what you suffered. They were looking for revenge."

"Thanks to you they got left and I escaped a tough experience," replied Tom.

While they were talking Flynn was cutting the boy loose from his bonds and relieving him of the stone.

"The police must be notified of the return of those rascals," said the boss driller. "The sooner they're put behind bars the better."

Flynn was curious to know how O'Connor and Sadler had captured Tom, so the boy told him how they had come upon him unaware while he was standing beside the derrick, and how his mishap of stepping into the hole had placed him in their power.

"Did they intend to leave you suspended indefinitely?"

"I couldn't tell you whether that was their intention or not. Under ordinary circumstances there wasn't any chance in fifty of anybody coming this way and releasing me, so if they meant to leave me up there I guess there wouldn't have been much life in me by tomorrow morning," said Tom.

"It's a worse outrage than their attack on the old hermit. They must be captured and made to suffer for it."

About this time Jennie arrived with her mother's hired man, armed with a revolver, but his services were not needed now.

After Tom had told his story over again for the benefit of the girl and the hired man the latter went back to his work on the Dean farm and Jennie remained with Tom and Flynn.

"Jennie said I'd find you over here at the derrick, and she concluded to come along with me, that's how it happens that we came here in time to relieve you from your predicament," said Flynn.

"Did you want to see me about anything special?" asked the boy.

"Well, as I had nothing particular on my hands I thought I'd take a look at the holes bored by the El Capitan people. They did most of the work before I came to this neighborhood and finished up while I was working for the Lucinda Oil Company."

"I wonder how the report got out that they struck oil in this spot when it is evident they didn't?" said Tom.

"I couldn't tell you. There might have been some favorable indications that failed to pan out," replied Flynn.

The boss driller looked at the hole and at the top layer of debris that had come out of it.

"I'd have to do a bit of drilling at the bottom before I could say whether there was any likelihood of oil being down there or not," he said.

"If I could afford to pay for the work I'd have it done," replied Tom.

"It wouldn't cost so much maybe to make an experimental test. After we get through with

the hole the Caliope Company begins in a day or two I'll see what I can do for you. It would be a great thing for you if oil was found here."

"You bet it would. If you will try and help me out and anything comes of it I'll see that you get an interest in the results," said Tom.

The three then left the derrick and walked back to the Dean farmhouse. Flynn said he'd telephone the police in town about O'Connor and Sadler on his way home.

"I'll tell them how the rascals treated you, and that as long as they are at large their presence is a menace to the community," concluded the man.

After dinner Tom and Jennie, having nothing better to occupy their time, started on a walk up the road. Before they had gone far they met Chip Sadler and a crony of his coming along. Chip gave a gasp when he saw Tom. The young rascal had seen his father and Red O'Connor a little while before, and they told him how they had treated the young well-borer.

Chip was delighted with the information, for he hated Tom more than ever since the accidental wounding of his leg, which he was sure Tom had done on purpose, and was not the least bit grateful for the other's silence on a matter that would have landed him in jail. He had hunted up his friend Micky O'Brien, who was a youth after his own heart, and it was the intention of the pair to visit the vicinity of the derrick and enjoy the uncomfortable predicament they expected to find Tom in.

So when they met the boy walking with Jennie in the road, as cheerful as if nothing of any moment had happened to him that morning, they were greatly surprised and grievously disappointed. Chip's curiosity was excited as to how Tom had managed to escape his fate.

"Hello!" he said in his usually disagreeable tone. "How is it you are around here?"

"Any objection to me using the county road at the same time as yourself?" laughed Tom good-naturedly.

"Naw; but I thought you was somewhere else?"

"Where else?" asked Tom.

Chip concluded not to say just where he had expected to find the young well-borer, so he merely said:

"Somewheres," and then winked at his companion, who grinned.

Tom and Jennie then passed on, leaving Chip to wonder how the former had got out of his bad fix. The two young people walked up the hillside back from the road. It was a sunshiny afternoon, with scarcely a cloud in the sky. The air was warm and clear as a bell. An extensive wood covered a good part of the hill, which had a gentle rise, easy to walk.

As long as Tom had been in that neighborhood he had never visited that wood. He decided to go there to-day with his fair companion. They found a rough pathway leading in among the trees, and following it, were soon out of the direct rays of the sun. It was not at all dark in that part of the wood, for the sunshine sifted through branches and leaves.

"It's a wonder we never thought of coming this way before," said Tom, enjoying the sylvan walk.

"I suppose you never thought it worth while," Jennie replied.

"I'm not stuck on exploring a wood as a general thing," said Tom. "I thought we'd come this way to-day just for a change. Here's a picturesque spot. Let's sit down and rest a while, not that I'm tired, but you might be after our three-mile walk."

"Oh, I don't get tired as easily as that," laughed the girl.

"This dell is adapted for at least two purposes—for a poet to come and connect with rural inspiration, or for two persons like us to come and make love without much fear of having a third person butt in on them."

"Make love!" cried Jennie, with a blush. "What a ridiculous idea!"

"They say everybody does it some time, whether it's ridiculous or not."

"Do they?" she asked innocently.

"Don't you think it's nice to have somebody you like make love to you?"

"Dear me, I don't know. I never had any one make love to me."

"Why, I've been trying to do that ever since I came to live at your house."

"You have?" she replied coquettishly. "I'm sure I wasn't aware of the fact."

"Oh, come now, you know I think a whole lot of you."

"You say you do."

"And I mean it. Don't you believe my word?"

"Why, yes, I wouldn't think of doubting any statement you make."

"Well, I'd like to know how much you think of me."

"Why?"

"Because I'm interested in finding out."

"Don't you know already?" she asked, looking at her fingers clasped in her lap.

"If I did it wouldn't be necessary for me to ask you. Come, tell me."

"One mustn't tell everything one thinks," she replied evasively.

"But I want you to tell me that," he said coaxingly.

"And suppose I won't tell you, what then," she answered, with a sidelong glance that quite fascinated him.

"If you won't I suppose I can't make you," replied Tom, a bit disappointed.

"You know mother and I like you very much indeed," she said.

"I take it for granted that you do, for you have both treated me better than most people would. I'm grateful, too, and would do a whole lot for your mother. As for yourself, I think there isn't anything too good for you."

"My, what a compliment!"

"I don't call it a compliment. I think you're the nicest little girl in the world. I believe I have told you that before, and expect to keep right on telling you the same thing indefinitely," said Tom earnestly.

"Oh, there are a lot of nicer girls than me in the world. Ever so much prettier and——"

"There may be prettier, but not so much so. Nicer I'll swear they are not. They couldn't be."

"Dear me, you are trying to make me vain, aren't you?"

"Not much danger of me doing that. You're too sensible."

"Thank you for the excellent opinion you seem

to have of me. If anybody heard you now they'd think you were trying to——"

"They wouldn't think I was trying to do anything but tell the truth," he interrupted. "However, there's nobody around here to overhear what I'm saying."

"That's where you're mistaken, Tom Cobb," said a hoarse voice behind them. "Haw, haw, haw!"

Tom and Jennie sprang up from the fallen tree on which they were sitting and turned around to look at the intruder, whose voice the boy instinctively recognized.

Their startled eyes rested on Red O'Connor and Sandy Sadler, each holding a stout tree limb in his hand and looking particularly wicked.

CHAPTER VIII.—How Nerve and Pluck Wins Out.

"Well, what do you chaps want?" asked Tom in a resolute tone.

"For one thing we want to know how you got down from the top of the derrick," replied O'Connor.

"If you'd stayed around a while longer you would have found out."

"As we didn't stay we'd like you to tell us."

"I've got no breath to waste on a couple of cowardly rascals like you," answered Tom pluckily.

"Oh, you ain't," snarled O'Connor savagely. "Perhaps you think you'll need it before we get through with you. We've got you in our power again, so what's to stop us from cracking your head if we choose to do it?"

"You might find out if you try it on," said Tom coolly, placing one foot on the log and making a significant movement toward his right hip pocket, at the same time looking the rascal squarely in the eye.

"Look out!" cried Sadler in a warning tone. "He's got a gun."

Tom's plucky behavior and the possibility that he really might be armed disconcerted O'Connor.

"Who helped you out of the scrape we left you in?" he asked, sparring for time.

"Tim Flynn did, if you want to know real bad."

"How long did you hang before he saw you?"

"Long enough for you two to get out of sight up the lane."

"Is that all?" replied O'Connor, with a smothered imprecation.

"It was long enough to suit me. If I'd hung there as long as you two no doubt intended you'd have probably had a murder to answer for."

"I don't reckon anybody would have known we had a hand in it if you had turned up your toes. Since you got out of that so easily we'll have to fix you some other way. There's more than one way of killin' a cat."

"And there's more than one way of putting rascals like you out of business," replied Tom.

Red O'Connor, with a howl of rage, made a rush at Tom, swinging his club at the same time.

The boy dropped like a flash, and the blow swung harmlessly through the air.

At the same time the scoundrel tripped over the stump and sprawled over Tom. The boy rose and threw him to one side, his head striking the

edge of the stump and jarring him pretty considerably. Tom took advantage of the chance to snatch the club from his hand. Then springing over the stump he rushed like a whirlwind at Sadler. That rascal, taken by surprise, tried to defend himself. The effort was a failure, for Tom meant business.

Whack! His club dashed Sandy's from his hand.

Crack! The second blow caught Sadler on the arm and brought a howl of pain and many imprecations from his lips. As Tom raised his weapon to repeat the performance Sadler turned around and skidooed as fast as he could, leaving his companion to fight it out by himself.

Tom picked up his club, and rejoining Jennie, who had been watching the course of events with her heart in her mouth, handed the stout weapon to her.

O'Connor had picked himself up and stood scowling at them.

"Come, Jennie," said the boy, "we'd better get away while the chance is ours. Goodby, Mr. O'Connor. When next I see you and your friend I hope it will be in the hands of the police."

The rascal shook his fist at the brave boy.

"We'll fix you yet, Tom Cobb," he roared. "And we'll do it for keeps, too."

"Oh, dear, what a dreadful man!" said Jennie, as Tom hurried her from the dell. "I was so frightened because I feared they were going to injure you."

"It put up a pretty good bluff, and O'Connor spoiled their chances by tripping over that log."

"You were very brave to face them the way you did."

"That's the only way to act, put on a bold front in the face of danger. If I'd looked frightened they would have captured me in no time. The idea that I had a revolver in my pocket kept Sadler from backing his associate up. He's a cowardly brute, and his son Chip is very much like him."

They hurried along as fast as they could go until they got clear of the wood, when they felt comparatively safe from the enemy.

"There's Chip now with a basket on his arm," said Tom. "I'll bet he's bringing food to his father and O'Connor."

Chip saw them approaching and hung his head down as if he was looking for something on the ground.

"Where are you going with that basket, Chip?" asked Tom.

"What business is that of yours?" replied the youth sourly.

"I suppose it's full of grub for your father and Red O'Connor?"

Chip looked uneasy.

"Look out that you don't find the police waiting to take you in with your father and Red," chuckled Tom.

"Are they caught?" gasped Chip.

"You'd better go ahead and find out. I'll never tell you."

"You want me to get took up, blame you!" snarled the youth.

"I could have had you arrested weeks ago if I wanted to put you in jail."

"No, you couldn't. I didn't do nothin'."

"Didn't you? That's funny. I had the idea

you were watching while your father and Red were doing up old Mr. Willett."

"I wasn't watchin'," growled Chip.

"You were in the house, at any rate. You tried to queer me when I was defending myself. I could have you pulled in any time for it, so you'd better behave yourself."

"If the perlice are up yonder I ain't goin' there, bet your life," said Chip, starting back the way he came.

Tom laughed.

"Sadler and O'Connor are likely to go hungry to-day," he said to Jennie. "It will serve them right. I'd have been half starved at the top of that derrick only that you and Mr. Flynn came along."

When they reached home Tom found that Flynn had been at the house with a letter that had come for him. It was postmarked Los Angeles, and the boy wondered who had written him from that town.

"Maybe it's from Mr. Willett," suggested Jennie.

"That's so. I didn't think of him."

Tom tore the envelope open, and when he pulled out the enclosure he discovered a bank draft in it for \$1,000. The letter was not from Mr. Willett, but from a lawyer. He stated that the hermit was dead, and before he died he had instructed him to forward the enclosed sum of money to Tom Cobb. That was all.

"He doesn't state when the old man died, nor what was the cause of his death. Nothing, in fact, but the bare statement about the money," said Tom.

"Poor old man!" said Mrs. Dean. "I didn't think he'd live much longer. He was greatly changed after that attack by those two rascals. I'm sure he never got over it, though he said he felt all right when he left here for Los Angeles."

"Well, he's treated me pretty good. Left me his farm, and now \$1,000 in money. I shall always remember him with respect and gratitude," said Tom.

After supper Tom sat out on the front veranda facing the road and thought how he would use that money.

"I shall use all of it if necessary to try and find oil on my property," he said to himself. "Somehow or another I feel sure there's oil there. I couldn't explain just why I think so, but I do. Kind of feel it in my bones. There's a pile of money in oil these days, if you can get enough of it out of the ground. The Lucinda is a regular bonanza. If I owned 100 shares of that stock I'd be pretty well fixed. One of these days maybe there'll be the Willett Oil Company, with Thomas Cobb president and general manager. That would sound pretty good. Then perhaps some enterprising newspaper would send for my photo to use with a graphic story telling how a poor young well-borer became an oil magnate. This is certainly the greatest country in the world for opportunities that lead to success. The woods are full of poor boys who have risen to riches and notoriety. I'd like to join the bunch."

When he met Flynn next day Tom told him about his legacy of \$1,000.

"Now I have the funds to pay you for undertaking a test of the derrick hole at least. I want you to tackle it at the first chance you have," the boy said.

"I certainly will. I am very much interested in the idea of getting oil out of your property, and will do my best to reach that satisfactory result if it is possible to do it. You must not be too sanguine, however. Tom, for as things stand the chances look against it."

"If I had \$10,000 instead of \$1,000 I'd spend every cent of it trying to strike oil on the Willett farm," said Tom resolutely.

"Well, I wish you every success, Tom," said the boss driller, and there the matter rested for the present.

CHAPTER IX.—Flynn Discovers the Indications of Oil on the Willett Farm.

True to his promise, as soon as the Caliope hole was finished and shot, producing rather unsatisfactory results, by the bye, Tim Flynn brought his ropes, drills and other paraphernalia to the Willett farm to have a go at the neglected hole under the derrick. He agreed to make his experiments for Tom at cost price, or the bare value of the labor. Tom never worked harder or more eagerly than when he tackled this job on his own property. Although he tried to look at the matter in a philosophical light and prepare himself for adverse results, still he felt that it would be a bitter disappointment to him if no indication of oil was found.

Nothing came of the first two days' work, although the hole was as deep as the gushers on the Lucinda claim.

Flynn was constantly examining the stuff that came to the surface in order to find out what kind of rock the drill was penetrating. On the morning of the third day the boss driller suddenly became intensely interested in a contribution from below that came up. He made fresh examinations every little while, and the result seemed to give him great satisfaction. When the time came to knock off work for dinner Flynn took Tom aside.

"I've got good news for you, my boy," he said.

"What is it?"

"We've struck oil-bearing rock to a dead certainty. It won't do to go any further at present. There's oil down there as sure as eggs are eggs, and if it was to spout of its own accord it would go to waste, for you haven't even a single tank to store it in. You must interest some capitalist, or form a company and put the promotion shares on the market at a low figure so as to raise the funds necessary to build a couple of tanks large enough to hold at least 500 barrels each."

"I don't know anything about forming a company," replied Tom. "If I were to try and interest a capitalist I'm afraid he'd want the lion's share of the profits."

"Take a trip to Los Angeles and have a talk with some reliable promoter. He'll give you all the informations about forming a company that you need, and he'll tell you what it will cost you for him to put the stock on the market. Probably you'll have to give up half the receipts, but you've got to have money before you can make any further move. The simplest and least profitable move for you to make would be to lease your oil rights. I wouldn't advise you to do anything like that, for you have this well all ready for

operation, and all that is needed to make it flow is the services of a 'shooter.'"

"I won't lease my rights. I'll go to Los Angeles and see what I can find out and then I'll decide what I'll do," replied Tom.

Jennie and her mother were delighted when Tom returned to dinner and reported that Flynn had announced in an authoritative way that there was oil under the derrick well.

"You'll soon be a rich boy," said the girl smilingly.

"I hope so. You want to keep solid with me now, and maybe some day I'll make a rich girl of you."

Jennie blushed, for she knew what Tom meant.

Mrs. Dean also understood the boy's remark, and she had no objection to matters taking that turn, for there was nobody she would sooner trust her daughter's happiness to than Tom Cobb.

Flynn did not resume work at the derrick that afternoon, but locked his paraphernalia up in Tom's barn until he was ready to employ it elsewhere. In a day or two Tom packed his grip and started for Los Angeles.

He put up at a cheap hotel and then began making inquiries for the office of a good promoter. The woods were full of such men, but to secure the services of a thoroughly reliable man or firm was not an easy matter for the boy. However, he was a shrewd lad, and it was not easy to hoodwink him. He made his inquiries only of the most reliable people, and was directed to a responsible firm. Securing an interview with the head of the firm he stated his case clearly and to the point. The firm's terms were \$1,000 down as a kind of retaining fee and evidence of good faith.

"I've got nearly \$1,000," replied the boy, "but I don't care to put it all up. I'll need some of the money for my personal uses. Can't you reduce your terms to suit my case?"

The gentleman pondered a few minutes.

"You say you can prove that there is oil on your property, and that you have a well already bored?" he said.

"Yes, sir."

"Very well. If you are willing to pay the expenses of one of my representatives to go to your place to examine the definiteness of your claim I will take your case under advisement. Upon his report I'll figure what, if anything, we can do for you. Should his statement warrant our taking up with you I will furnish you with a general idea of what will have to be done, and the average cost of putting such a programme through."

"I agree to that, sir. How much shall you want?"

The promoter stated a moderate sum and Tom handed it to him, taking his receipt for the money.

"You can return home now," said the gentleman. "In a few days you will receive a letter from me stating when you may expect to have a visit from the man I shall send."

That ended the interview and Tom left his office. Next morning he took a train for Visalia, and shortly afterward reached the Dean farm, where his return was hailed with delight by Jennie, who had been lonesome during his absence.

"Jennie has been moping about the house ever since you went away," said Mrs. Dean at the supper table.

"Why, mother, what a fib!" exclaimed the girl, blushing like a rose. "You know that isn't so."

"So you missed me, did you, Jennie?" said Tom in a tone of satisfaction.

"Of course I missed you some. So did mother," she answered.

"You missed me some, eh? How much?"

"Now you're trying to tease me."

"I judge from what your mother said that you missed me a whole lot. Come now, why not admit the truth?"

"I've told you that mother and I both missed you a great deal. Now I'm not going to say another word about it."

Tom laughed and Jennie's mother smiled. They formed a very happy little family that night, for Tom was glad to be back, and they were glad to have him. Two days later Tom received a letter from the Los Angeles firm of promoters informing him that an expert in oil matters would reach his property on a certain day, and would expect to be in touch with whatever developments had come to light. Tom showed the letter to Flynn, and the boss driller promised to be on hand to put him wise to the situation as it stood on the Willett farm.

CHAPTER X.—Formation of the Willett Oil Company.

In a few days the expert appeared on the scene, and Tom called on Flynn to take him in hand and enlighten him on the subject he came to investigate. He took his dinner and supper at Mrs. Dean's house, and a room for the night was placed at his disposal. When he had seen all he considered necessary he had a long talk with Tom.

He told the boy that his report would be a favorable one, as he was satisfied of the existence of oil on his property. Next morning he departed for Los Angeles. Three days later a letter came from the promoting firm asking Tom to come on again, as the writer preferred to talk to him in person instead of committing what he had to say to paper.

So Tom made another visit to Los Angeles. The promoter had a proposition to make to him. He said he had spoken to a capitalist looking for an investment and the man was willing to invest in an oil company if assured of good returns. He had other men on his list who were also looking for oil investments. If Tom would put the matter in his hands he would form a company to exploit his oil property. Tom said that he would agree to nothing that would take the control of matters out of his hands.

"Of course," replied the promoter, "I'll fix that all right. We'll capitalize the company at a quarter of a million—that is, 250,000 shares at a par value of \$1 a share. The company will give you 125,100 shares, or a controlling interest, in return for the deed of the property, which will, of course, convey everything. Mr. Radford, the capitalist, will take 50,000 shares at the cash price of twenty-five cents, thus putting \$12,500 into the treasury. I know half a dozen other persons whom I can interest to the extent of, say, 40,000 shares, which at twenty-five cents will put \$10,000 more to the working capital. That will leave 34,900 shares in the treasury to be disposed of if need be at some future time. Our terms for promoting this company are \$500 cash down

and \$2,000 when the company shall have been incorporated."

"I wouldn't be able to raise the \$2,000," said the boy.

"We will take your note for the amount, secured by an assignment of your stock. You can have a year to pay the note in. From the report of my expert I should judge that you will have no difficulty whatever in meeting it even before twelve months have gone by. If you accept our offer I will at once arrange a meeting between you and Mr. Radford, and afterwards he and you can have an interview with the other persons interested in oil."

"I will consider your proposition and let you know tomorrow whether I will take up with it or not," replied Tom.

The promoter nodded and the boy took his leave.

Tom immediately called on a good lawyer to whom he had been recommended, and handing him \$100 as his fee, laid the case in all its bearings before him. The lawyer advised him to take up with the promoter's plan.

"It's a reliable firm and will treat you square. I will accompany you to their office to-morrow and see that your interests are legally protected. I will also be present when you meet Mr. Radford. You had better arrange to have him call at my office at a stated hour. In fact, at all stages of this arrangement I will look after your interests and make the charge as reasonable as possible. Should you desire to have me act as general attorney for the company I will make a reduction in my bill to you individually. Having control of the majority of the stock you will of course elect yourself president, and as you are inexperienced it would be necessary for you to have an experienced person like myself to act as your adviser and pass on all important matters within the lines of your duty as head of the company."

On the following morning Tom and the lawyer visited the promoter's office and the initial arrangements were made for forming the Willett Oil Company. Tom met the capitalist on the following day and had a satisfactory interview with him, the expert who had visited his property being also present. An informal meeting was next held, to which six other moneyed men were invited. Between them 90,000 shares of stock, the lawyer taking the 900, were subscribed for at twenty-five cents a share.

The company was then formed pending incorporation, and the promoter instructed to go ahead. Tom, the capitalist, the lawyer and one of the others signed the application paper asking that the company be incorporated under the laws of California. There being nothing further to detain Tom in Los Angeles he left for home. In due time the company became a fact, and Tom was called to Los Angeles again to be present at the first regular meeting.

Tom, Mr. Radford and four of the other stockholders were elected directors. The directors then elected Thomas Cobb president, Mr. Radford treasurer, two of the others vice-president and secretary, and the lawyer was appointed the company's attorney at a moderate salary. Tom was to receive a salary of \$2,500 the first year, and was to act as general manager. He was authorized to secure the exclusive services of Tim

Flynn as his general assistant, at a salary satisfactory to the boss driller.

An office was hired in the city which was to be in charge of Mr. Radford, and Tom instructed him to arrange for the immediate construction of a 5,000-gallon tank to begin with. The capitalist decided he would accompany the boy to the oil district, take a look at the property and have a talk with Flynn. He was not an expert in oil himself, and had gone into the speculation on the strength of the report of the promoter's expert.

His visit to the property was merely to secure the deed making the Willett farm over to the company, and to take a look around and familiarize himself with matters which it was necessary for him to know.

Tom invited him to stay at the Dean farm during his visit, and he was hospitably received by Mrs. Dean and her daughter, whom Tom had advised by mail of his coming. Next day a conference was held between Tom, Flynn and Mr. Radford at the derrick well, and then he was shown over the farm and the other borings pointed out to him. Flynn pointed out the most suitable location for the first tank, and furnished the capital with all the necessary information he needed to go ahead with. Mr. Radford was then taken around to the more important oil claims in the neighborhood, and naturally he was particularly interested in the Lucinda property, stock of which company he had been trying for some time in vain to purchase.

Flynn was at this time engaged in boring a second well on the Caliope claim. He would have to give up any further work of this kind at the end of his present contract, when his salary would begin with Tom's company.

Mr. Radford was pleased to find that he thoroughly understood all about the oil industry, and was satisfied he was the most valuable man the company could have hired to look after its interests on the ground.

The capitalist spent three days together in the oil fields and then returned to Los Angeles to start the ball rolling.

As it would be some little time before the tank could be completed ready for business, Tom set about having the Willett farmhouse converted into an office and general headquarters for the company.

The barn was cleared out so as to be used as a storehouse for oil barrels, a number of which were soon to be shipped to the property, and a new stable was built to accommodate the teams necessary to haul the product of the company to the railroad. By the time all these things had been finished ready for use the tank arrived with a force of men to complete it and put it in position. Tom secured a night watchman recommended to him by Flynn, and he brought his wife and family with him. The rooms in the farmhouse above the offices were allotted to them, and they took possession at once. While the tank was being fixed up 100 oil barrels arrived and were stored in the barn. Although neither Tom nor Flynn had given out any information, the news of the incorporation of the Willett Oil Company and the preparation being made on the farm to carry on the oil business gave rise to a rumor that oil indications had been discovered on the property once owned by the dead hermit and vainly exploited by the El Capitan company.

This caused a flutter of interest in the locality, and visitors from the other claims frequently appeared on the property and bombarded Tom with questions.

He maintained a non-committal attitude, answering directly only such inquiries as his judgment dictated. He didn't believe that it was prudent to tell anything more than he could help, as the affairs of the new company were still in an embryo stage, and no one could as yet foresee how successful things would turn out. At length everything was in readiness to tap the derrick well. Mr. Radford was notified and promised to come out and see what the result would be. He had never seen a well shot and was curious to witness the sight. One of the "shooters" who had succeeded O'Connor and Sadler, who, by the way, had not been caught by the police, was engaged and promised to be on hand with his nitroglycerine and the apparatus connected with its use.

CHAPTER XI.—On the Eve of an Oil Strike.

The "shooter" was an Italian named Pietro Zuccaro, and was naturally an experienced man at his calling. His vocation was altogether too dangerous to be followed by any man not well posted in every little detail.

He kept his supply of nitroglycerine torpedoes, which formed the main feature of his hazardous trade, in a small, retired cave in the hills, the location of which no one but himself was supposed to know.

As a matter of fact no one had any curiosity as to its situation as long as they were assured it would not cause any serious damage if it by accident blew up. When it was necessary for Zuccaro to renew his stock of explosives he set out in a red-painted spring wagon for the place where he obtained it.

Once he got his load in his vehicle he drove slowly and carefully, for he knew he carried his life in his hands. He took the most retired roads when he could, and sometimes traveled at night when he had to follow roads where there was much traffic.

Any driver seeing his well-known wagon, with the word "Torpedo" painted in white letters on its red sides, was careful to give him as wide a berth as possible. It happened that the day before Zuccaro had engaged to shoot the derrick well on the Willett property Red O'Connor, wandering about in the woods with Sandy Sadler, came across the cave where the Italian had his explosives stored. Entrance was barred with a ponderous door, secured by a heavy padlock, painted red with the sign, "DANGER! Nitroglycerine. KEEP AWAY!" in big white letters. The two rascals stopped and looked at the door and sign. Being "shooters" themselves, they easily understood that this was the storehouse belonging to their successor in the oil fields, and they had no particular fear of the stuff hidden away under the rocks. Just why they hung around the neighborhood when they knew they were wanted by the police of the neighboring town, and were liable to be recognized by some straggler in the hills, could only be explained by themselves. Sometimes they were supplied with food by Chip Sadler, and sometimes Sandy visited his

home under cover of darkness and carried back supplies with him. They had learned from Chip that a new oil company had taken possession of the Willett farm, and that there was great activity at the property under the direction of Tom Cobb, who seemed to be the ruling spirit there.

The mention of Tom's name had the same effect on them that a red piece of cloth has on a ferocious bull—it always angered them and made them say things that wouldn't look well in print.

It was not pleasant news for them to learn that the boy they hated was getting up in the world, and they chafed because they found no chance to get back at him. As they stood looking at the door of the nitroglycerine cave O'Connor said:

"We must manage to get hold of one or two of them torpedoes, Sandy, and then try and find an openin' to use the stuff on Tom Cobb. I'll never rest satisfied till we've got square with him, and the best way would be to send him to kingdom come."

"How can we reach them torpedoes? The door is a stout one and the lock is strong enough to resist a lot of tamperin' with. It wouldn't be safe to try and smash it in; not knowin' where the torpedoes are stacked."

O'Connor examined the lock carefully.

"I think we could cut enough of the wood away to weaken the staple," he said. I've a sharp knife, so I'm goin' to try, and you can help me out."

He set to work with a will, and though the wood was hard he made good progress.

When he grew tired Sandy took his place and continued what he had started. They worked away steadily for more than an hour and finally succeeded in getting the staple, with the lock attached, out.

To open the door was then the work of a moment. Five minutes later they were walking through the woods each with a torpedo in his hands. When they reached their rendezvous, more than a mile away, they hid the torpedoes where they were not likely to be molested, and then they began to figure on some murderous plan for ending Tom Cobb's young career.

Tom, little dreaming that his enemies were still in the vicinity, and that they were conspiring to do him up, was enjoying life as he never had before. He had reached the very pinnacle of his ambition, and all that was wanting to make him thoroughly happy was the sight of the crude oil shooting out of the derrickhole in a volume sufficient to promise profitable results for the company of which he was the controlling factor.

"To-morrow," he said to Jennie, "we shall know whether things are coming our way or not. Mr. Flynn says that there isn't any doubt that the nitroglycerine will bring up oil, but whether the flow will meet our expectations or not he cannot say, but he thinks from certain signs that it will. Now, the Caliope Oil Company has three wells much nearer the Lucinda than our place, and yet the results so far are unsatisfactory. Mr. Flynn says that is no criterion to go by, as the oil streak runs like gold and silver lodes, not always where you are expecting to find it. In his opinion he believes from the character of the oil rock specimens that have come up with the drills that the derrick well has struck the same vein of oil that is making fortunes for the Lucinda people.

If that should prove true the Willett Oil Company will be right in it with both feet, and yours truly will be on the road to a million, more or less."

"I do hope that your expectations will be realized, Tom," said the girl earnestly.

"I can't help feeling nervous over the matter, because so much depends on what happens after the shooter has done his work. Mr. Radford would be awfully disappointed if things failed to pan out, and he is the principal owner of the stock next to myself. Mr. Flynn's assurances have raised his expectations to a high pitch, and he really does not look for anything short of absolute success for the company."

"Will you take me over to see the well shot tomorrow?" Jennie asked.

"Sure. You and your mother can both come. You can view operations from the point where Mr. Flynn, Mr. Radford and I will stand, out of the danger zone, and yet near enough to see all that is to be seen."

"I've heard it is a great sight to see a well spout for the first time," said the girl.

"It is when it's a well of the Lucinda caliber. I've seen two of their wells shot and they spouted like a mammoth whale, and kept it up till brought under control and piped to a tank," replied Tom.

"It will be wonderful if after the failure the El Capitan Oil Company made of the farm you should make a rich strike out of one of their discarded wells."

"Mr. Flynn said they gave up on the very threshold of success. Such things happen in other industries besides oil. It isn't the man or the company that starts the ball rolling that always comes out ahead. There are hundreds of instances on record where the man that came after was the person who achieved results."

"The people who put money in the El Capitan Oil Company will not be pleased to hear that another company is making money where they failed."

"Sorry, but the El Capitan bunch have had their day. It is our innings now, and if the Willett farm should prove to be a second Lucinda I don't see that they can make any kick. It was up to them to strike oil while their lease was in force. It ran long enough to give them every chance to develop the matter. The trouble with the El Capitan was, I have been told, lack of enough funds to buck up against an apparently losing game and turn defeat into victory."

Jennie's mother called her at that moment and she left Tom standing on the front porch in the gathering twilight. The boy didn't wait for her to come back, but started over toward the Willett farm to see the night watchman about something. On his way he noticed with some surprise two figures skulking along ahead of him. He could not imagine who they were, nor what brought them there. He decided that it was his duty not to lose sight of them, since they might be up to some kind of mischief. It did not occur to him that these men might be Red O'Connor and Sandy Sadler, for he believed that fear of capture by the police had driven them out of the county. The two men were aiming straight for the Willett farmhouse, and Tom followed as close behind them as he dared without disclosing his presence. When they came in sight of the shadowy building

and saw lights shining from the upper windows, they stopped.

"Chip never told us there were people livin' in that house," said the voice of Red O'Connor. "We can't blow the blamed place up now."

"I'd rather blow up Tom Cobb himself than his property," returned Sadler. "Isn't there some way of enticing him from the Dean house, freezin' on to him and carryin' him off to some quiet spot—the derrick, for instance—and after tyin' him to one of the uprights leave him with a torpedo so fixed that at a certain time it would fall on a stone, explode and wipe him off the earth?"

Tom was close enough to hear the foregoing and to identify the speakers. As he crouched down in the shadow of some bushes his foot turned on a stone and he uttered an involuntary though subdued ejaculation of pain. O'Connor and Sadler heard him, and feeling sure it was some spy on their track, they made a sudden dash back and grabbed him.

CHAPTER XII.—Face to Face With Death.

"Strike a match, Sandy, and let's see who we've got," said O'Connor.

Sandy flashed a lucifer and both uttered exclamations of surprise and satisfaction when they recognized their prisoner.

"So it's you, is it?" cried O'Connor exultantly. "Followin' us, I s'pose? I reckon we caught you in time. We've been wantin' to see you—haven't we, Sandy?"

"We have," grinned Sadler. "Very obligin' of you to turn up, sonny."

"We ain't had no chance to meet you since that time we parted in the woods," put in O'Connor. "Sandy thinks you didn't treat him right that day."

"Feel in his pockets and see if he has a gun," suggested Sadler.

O'Connor felt of Tom's hip pocket and found nothing in the shape of a weapon.

"No, he ain't heeled tonight. It wouldn't have done him no good if he was. It's too bad that he hasn't a revolver, for it would come in handy for us. Now I'll hold him while you gag him. We don't want him shootin' his mouth off and bringin' the people in the house down on us to see what's wrong."

Sandy Sadler covered Tom's mouth with the boy's handkerchief. Then they yanked him on his feet.

"Pick up that torpedo, Sandy, and we'll take this young gent over to the derrick and give him a quicker rise in the world than we did with the rope."

They forced Tom along between them till they reached the derrick.

"Now, Sandy, skirmish around for a piece of rope for us to tie this chap with," said O'Connor.

There was plenty of rope in the near-by shed, the door of which was secured by a cheap hasp and staple which Sadler broke open in no time. Inside of a few minutes the two rascals had Tom bound to the foot of one of the uprights composing the derrick. O'Connor then threw a piece of line over the lower crosspiece, about four feet above the boy's head. Then he brought the torpedo forward.

"Know what this is, Tom Cobb?" he asked with a grim chuckle, holding the torpedo up within a couple of inches of the lad's face. "It's a torpedo full of nitroglycerine, same as is used for shootin' a well. We're goin' to use this here one to give you a h'ist that'll beat the one Molly gave the cat—eh, Sandy?"

"I bet you," replied the other villain.

"It's an easy way of going to kingdom come, for you won't feel yourself goin'. I reckon you won't know what struck you when it goes off," laughed the scoundrel. "This is what you get for buttin' in on us at the farmhouse that night weeks ago, and for other things that have happened since. We'll lump the hull in one bill and give you a receipt in full to date."

He knelt and tied one end of the rope securely to the can of nitroglycerine.

"Hunt around and get a nice, flat rock, Sandy," he said. "You know what we want."

Sadler went off and was gone nearly ten minutes, during which O'Connor amused himself with the prisoner, picturing the horror of his coming death by nitroglycerine and assuring him that there wouldn't be enough left of him to fill a small box. Sandy fetched a good-sized flat rock back with him.

"That's just the thing," said O'Connor. "The can won't be able to miss it."

The rascal climbed up to the cross-piece and made a deep notch in it to hold the rope in place. Then he hoisted the can to within a few inches of the beam and made the end fast to the bottom of the upright to which Tom was bound.

"Now," he said to the boy, "as things stand, that can would stay there till somebody came in the mornin' and let you loose. As that wouldn't suit us I'm goin' to put a piece of candle down on the ground, light it so that the flame will reach the rope and burn it away by degrees. When the rope snaps the can will fall, strike the rock, and then you can guess what'll happen."

The rascal proceeded to put that diabolical plan into execution, and the reader can imagine what the feelings of Tom were as he realized the desperate predicament in which he was placed. He heard O'Connor strike a match. The rascal moved the candle into the best position to do its fateful work and then cried out to Sadler:

"Shove the stone under the can and then we'll be off."

Sandy placed the rock in position, and then he and O'Connor hurried off toward the road as fast as they could go, leaving Tom face to face with a horrible death. The boy was bound hard and fast to the upright, so that he couldn't make the least move to help himself. The horror of his position nearly turned his brain, for he believed that it would only take a few minutes for the rope to burn through and then nothing could save him. Had he not been gagged he would have shouted for help on the possibility of his voice reaching the night watchman, who might be walking about outside the house. At that tense moment he suddenly heard the voice of Jennie calling out, "Tom!" She had missed him from the porch and the hired man told her he had seen Tom walking toward the Willett farm. She immediately walked over to the Willett farmhouse and asked the watchman if he had seen him. He replied that he had not.

"Maybe he went over to the derrick," she said. "He can think of nothing else but that well which is going to be shot to-morrow. I'll walk over and see if he's there. Should he come while I'm away please tell him where I went."

The watchman offered to accompany her, but she said it wasn't necessary. He told her that Tom wasn't there half an hour since, as he was looking around the derrick at that time himself.

"He only left the house about half an hour ago," she replied, "and probably he went direct to the derrick."

She started for the spot, hoping to meet Tom there. When she made out the ghostly arms and legs of the derrick ahead of her she began to call out to him, and it was her calls that poor Tom heard at the most fateful moment in his young career. As her voice came nearer he realized that she was walking right into the same peril that hung over his head. He could not bear the idea that she, too, should be sacrificed, and he struggled desperately with his bonds. He wanted to warn her of the danger she was approaching, forgetting that her very coming might be his salvation. Every moment he expected that the can of nitroglycerine would fall and blow him and the derrick into atoms. It happened, however, that Providence had not overlooked him. A current of air close to the ground blew the candle flame out in a horizontal direction and kept it from the rope. Tom, however, was not aware of this fact, and his nerves were strung to their highest tension as the seconds slipped away. The boy's struggles amounted to nothing. He could neither warn the girl nor cry out for help. At length Jennie came around the corner of the shed near where the derrick reared its spindle shanks into the air.

"Tom! Are you here?" she cried again.

No answer came back to her, and she stopped to look around. Her sharp eyes detected the flickering candle flame beside one of the upright legs of the derrick. At the same time she saw the blurred outlines of Tom standing bound to the same upright.

"Tom, is that you?" she asked, stepping forward.

She saw the figure move in a strange way, but not a word came to her. She began to grow nervous. Who could this person be at the derrick, and what was he doing with the candle? If it was Tom he would surely have answered her, therefore it must be some stranger. Her first impulse was to turn and rush back to the house to tell the watchman. Something, however, seemed to hold her to the spot. She was a plucky little girl, and not easily frightened.

"Who's there?" she asked. "Why don't you speak?"

The figure continued to move in a squirming kind of way that she could not understand. She was satisfied that there was something wrong, and almost expected to see the figure spring at her. Then she heard a muffled guttural sound coming from the person. The sky had been growing brighter behind her, and now above the distant trees the round full moon sailed slowly into view. A shaft of silvery light first struck the top of the derrick and then began to creep downward. Its progress was rapid and the girl watched it with staring eyes. She knew it would soon throw the figure into relief and give her a better idea of the situation. At length she saw

the hanging nitroglycerine torpedo, but never having seen one before its significance was lost on her. A moment later Tom's face and gagged mouth appeared, and as she uttered a gasp his whole figure stood out clear and distinct in the moonlight.

"Tom, Tom, what is the matter?" she cried, rushing forward.

Before she had covered the distance she saw what was the matter—that he was gagged and bound.

"Oh, Tom, Tom!" she ejaculated. "Who has treated you this way?"

She tore the handkerchief away from his mouth.

"For Heaven's sake, Jennie, kick that candle away and catch hold of that rope!" he cried almost inarticulately.

Instinctively she obeyed him.

"I've put out the candle and I have hold of the rope."

"Don't let go of it for your life. You can hold it with one hand. Put the other in my right hand pocket, pull out my knife and cut me loose."

"Why is it necessary for me to hold on to this rope, Tom?" she asked as she got out his knife. "I can't open the blade with one hand."

Tom put his head back.

"Put the rope in my mouth," he said.

She did as he told her, wonderingly. He gripped the strands with his teeth. She then opened the knife and began cutting him free. The moment his hands were at liberty he grabbed the rope. Then he waited patiently for her to finish the job. As soon as he was free he stooped down and examined the rope where the candle had charred it.

He saw that it was as solid as ever. With a sigh of relief he let go of the rope, turned to the stone, which he pushed a yard away, and then unknottting the end of the rope which held the can of explosive, gently lowered the torpedo to the ground.

"Now, Tom, will you please explain what all this means?" asked Jennie eagerly.

"It means, Jennie, that you are an angel; that you have saved me from an awful death. That can contains a charge of nitroglycerine sufficient to blow me to eternity and the derrick to matchwood. You saw how it was suspended above the stone and the end of the rope tied to the foot of the derrick. The candle was put there to burn away the rope gradually. When it parted the torpedo would have fallen straight upon the stone, and the shock would have exploded it. You have saved my life, little girl, and I shall be grateful to you as long as I live."

He seized her in his arms and kissed her half a dozen times on the lips.

CHAPTER XIII.—A Stroke of Luck.

Staggered by his statement Jennie made no effort to release herself from his embrace; indeed, she couldn't have done it anyhow, as he held her too tightly.

"Oh, Tom, how came such a terrible thing to be done to you?" she faltered, beginning to feel quite weak and faint as she began to realize the seriousness of the peril which her young lover had faced.

"The rascals who worked the turn on me were no other than Red O'Connor and Sandy Sadler, who we supposed had fled the place. Or if they did go away for a while they have come back again. Their nerve is something phenomenal. As long as they are at liberty I shall not feel safe, for they have a standing grudge against me, and to get even with me they will not stop even at murder, as to-night's work of theirs shows."

He told her all that had happened from the moment he left the house till he heard her voice calling out to him in the darkness.

"How is it that you came here looking for me?" he asked. "It looks like the finger of Heaven."

She explained.

"Lord, but you're an angel!" he cried, kissing her again.

"Oh, Tom!" she cried, blushing furiously in the moonlight.

"What's the matter? Why, the service you have done me is worth a million kisses. However, I'll give them to you by instalments. Now look out, I'm going to carry this torpedo away."

"Don't touch it, Tom; please don't. It might —"

"No, there is no particular danger if it is handled gently, and you can bet I won't handle it any other way," he replied, taking the can up. It wouldn't do to let it remain here."

He carried it to the shed and laid it carefully down in a corner, placing a coil of rope on top of it.

"Now I guess we'll go home. But first I must call up the police on our 'phone. I'll have to read them the riot act about O'Connor and Sadler. They have simply got to catch them this time."

They walked to the house, where they found the watchman on the point of starting out on another tour of the company's property.

Tom said nothing to him about the strenuous experience he had been through, but went at once to the office 'phone.

What he said to the police made the man at the other end of the wire sit up and take notice.

He asked Tom a number of questions and promised to send several men to the Willett company's office at once to see him about the direction the rascals had taken when they left the boy to his fate.

"We'll wait here till the officers come, and then we'll go home," said Tom to Jennie.

When the watchman got back in about twenty minutes Tom told him what he had been up against.

The man was fairly staggered.

"Why, I was at the derrick only a short time before those rascals carried you there," he said.

"That fact wouldn't have done me any good. I don't believe they had any idea that there was a watchman on the place, for they didn't act as if they feared to be interrupted in their murderous work. I am not blaming you because you were not on hand to save me. It just happened that O'Connor and Sadler happened to hit on the right moment to carry out their purpose. This little girl saved me, and next to Heaven I shall be grateful to her as long as I live," said Tom fervently, casting a loving glance at Jennie.

"You may well be," replied the man. "You evidently had a narrow shave for your life. Where did the scoundrels go?"

"Toward the road. They are probably a good distance away by this time. I have no doubt they are sitting under some hedge waiting to hear the explosion and wondering why it is so long delayed."

"Have you notified the police?"

"I have. This is the third time they have been asked to capture those villains. Their two former efforts were failures. I hope they will be more fortunate this time. In fact, those men have got to be captured if I have to take a hand in the matter myself."

It was some time before the officers of the law arrived, but they did at last.

Tom told them his story, and took them out to the derrick and explained the method by which O'Connor and Sadler had adopted for the purpose of killing him.

"They seem to have it in for you hot, young man," said one of the officers.

"They certainly appear to be greatly interested in getting me out of the way," replied the boy. "I can't stand for this kind of business. Those men have got to be captured this time if it takes the whole police force of the country to do it. It looks as if they have some secure hiding-place in the hills. They must be routed out of it. I'd give something to know how they got hold of that torpedo. It must be one the rascals had left over out of their own stock. They might even have another, or two or three, for that matter, in their possession. The mere suspicion of such a thing should make their capture more imperative."

"You think they took to the hills after leaving you on the road to the next world?" said the officer.

"It's about the only place where they could escape immediate detection," replied Tom.

"We'll make a hunt of the hills once more for them; but it's an endless kind of job. Two of us will go one way and two another, and we ought to find some traces of their whereabouts," said the officer.

The four policemen then took their departure and started on their quest, while Tom escorted Jennie home.

Next morning Tom told Flynn about his strenuous experience of the previous evening, and the boss driller was almost paralyzed at the audacity and villainy of the exwell-shooters.

"You'll have to go armed, Tom, until those chaps are put behind the bars. It clearly is not safe for you to take any chances against them. They have singled you out as an object of vengeance, and it would be outrageous for them to reach you again. Their previous failure might incite them to kill you on the spot so as to make sure of making no further slip-up. If you haven't a revolver, my advice to you is to buy one right away and carry it all the time."

"I'll do it," answered Tom. "If I ever have occasion to shoot at them I'll take care not to miss them. They deserve no mercy at my hands."

Everything was in readiness at the derrick well for the "shooter" to get busy.

Flynn had the gang ready to attach the short pipe line to the well immediately after it was shot, provided the oil came up in quantity, as it was confidently expected to do.

Zuccaro, the Italian shooter, appeared about ten o'clock in some excitement.

"What's the trouble, Zuccaro?" asked Flynn.

"Malatesta! Da troub' is dis. Some rascal breaka open my plac in da hill where I keepa da torpedo. Steela one, two, t'ree, maybe more, can. Leava da door open so any one can walka in and helpa himself or blowa himself up, and I losea da mon' I pay for dem. If I catcha I fixa him, betcher your life."

"I guess I know who did it,"

"Ha! You knowa da man, eh? You tella me."

"There's two of them."

"Two?"

"Yes; the two shooters who used to operate here before you came on the ground—Red O'Connor and Sandy Sadler. They brought a torpedo, one of yours, I'll wager, over here last night and tried to blow up young Mr. Cobb, the president of this company."

"Blowa him up? Whata for?"

"Because they're down on him."

"Whata they rounda here for, eh? I thought they flya da coop 'cause da police wanta them bad."

"They've been hiding in the hills. Last night Mr. Cobb caught them prowling around this place. They jumped on him and made him a prisoner. Then they brought him over to this well and tried to blow him up with a torpedo."

Flynn described to Zuccaro what the two scoundrels had done to Tom, and told him how his life had been saved by Jennie Dean.

"Santa Marie! He escapea by da skina his teeth. One chancea in a t'ous. S'posea torpedo falla on stone, where you t'inka he be now, eh?"

"He'd be dead, of course. Blown to bits with the derrick."

"Wella, I guess," replied Zuccaro with a meaning grin.

"I'll show you the torpedo. It's in the shed. Maybe you'll be able to recognize it as one of yours."

Flynn showed the Italian the can of nitroglycerine which might have ended Tom's life, and he declared it was one of those stolen from his cave in the hills.

Mr. Radford now appeared on the scene, accompanied by Tom, Jennie and her mother.

The treasurer of the company had only just arrived from Los Angeles.

Zuccaro said that he was ready to shoot the well.

He had his torpedoes, ropes, etc., over at a secluded bunch of trees.

"Youa got everything read' I go ahead," he said.

"All right. You can start right in," replied Flynn.

Accordingly, everybody was told to retire to a certain distance where they would be safe and at the same time have a good view of all that happened.

By the time they were in position Zuccaro was seen crossing the field carrying a torpedo in his hand in a very careful way.

The derrick had previously been stripped of loose planks and now stood above the well well like a gigantic skeleton.

Before lowering the first torpedo into the well the Italian was seen to wipe the tube with great care so as to remove the least suspicion of moisture which might be nitroglycerine.

The friction of lowering the torpedo down the

well might lead to a premature explosion if he was not careful to see that it was perfectly clear of the smallest particle of the explosive on the outside.

After lowering the second tube, the one that was used on Tom the night before, the Italian took up a pointed iron cylinder and inserted that in the well hole.

After lowering it a certain distance he let go the line and ran from the vicinity of the derrick as fast as he could. He had scarcely covered any distance to speak of when the ground was shaken by a dull, heavy explosion, hundreds of feet down in the earth.

A rumbling sound followed, then a sullen roar, and then a thick column of liquid, of a dark brownish hue, spurted upward through the well hole.

It spread out a short distance above the mouth of the hole until it enveloped the entire upper half of the derrick, totally obscuring it, and rising some distance above the top of the spindrelly structure, to fall back upon itself in an oily spray.

In a moment the ground for many yards around the derrick was flooded with crude petroleum.

Flynn threw his hat into the air and shouted: "Eureka! A second Lucinda! Your fortune is made, young man!" and he clapped Tom on the shoulder. "This is indeed a stroke of luck!"

CHAPTER XIV.—Checkmated.

Flynn rushed his derrick gang forward to get the well under control and pipe it to the tank built to receive it.

There was no doubt now that the shooting of the well was a great success.

Oil in a copious stream was flowing up from the bowels of the earth, and the well seemed to put every other one in the district in the shade except those on the Lucinda property.

Apparently the derrick boring had connected with the same vein of oil rock.

Tom and Mr. Radford congratulated each other on the success that had attended the opening of the first well on the new oil company's property.

Flynn assured them that the company had one of the best gushers in the field, and that additional borings in the vicinity of the derrick well were bound to develop more of the same kind.

Mr. Radford dined at the Dean house and then hastened off to town to send the glorious news by telegraph to the other seven stockholders in Los Angeles.

It wasn't long before the news that a king-pin gusher had been shot on the Willett Oil Company's property spread all around the district, and a lot of interested people visited the farm to satisfy themselves that the report had not been exaggerated.

Representatives of the comparatively unsuccessful oil companies in the neighborhood stood around the well and viewed matters with envious eyes.

The manager of the Lucinda Oil Company was on hand, too, and he was satisfied that the Willett Oil Company had a good thing.

Everybody wondered why it was that the El Capitan people had failed to strike oil rock after all the money they had laid out in dead work.

Apparently they had merely paved the way for their successors to reap all the profit of the enterprise.

Filling barrels with oil and shipping them was begun immediately under Tom's directions.

More barrels were sent down to the property and these were filled in their turn, and more called for.

There were busy times at the farm, for the flow of oil out of that single well was found to be about 700 barrels a day, worth at the prevailing price of oil, sixty-three cents a barrel, \$441.

Only two of the Lucinda's wells beat this, No. 1, which turned out 800 barrels, and No. 2, 1,000 barrels daily.

After paying all charges Tom found that the derrick well would turn in a monthly profit to the company of about \$10,000.

It would require about \$6,000 of this money per month for drilling two additional wells, leaving an immediate sum of \$4,000 per month for dividends.

At the end of a year or fifteen months the other two wells would be brought in, and if they proved as productive as the derrick well the company would be able to count on a monthly profit of \$30,000.

There was no reason in that event why other wells should not be drilled, every additional one being calculated to produce a net income of at least \$10,000 a month.

Even three wells could be counted on producing an annual income of \$100,000 over and above the capitalized value of the company's stock.

That would naturally raise the value of the shares considerably above their par value.

As Tom owned half of the entire stock his holdings would probably be estimated as worth a quarter of a million.

With six wells in operation at the end of four years he might be worth half a million, or even more, without taking into consideration the large sum he would have received in dividends.

In fact, as matters pointed there was every prospect of Tom Cobb in time becoming a young Monte Cristo, while every stockholder connected with him was almost certain to become wealthy.

Tom was as happy as a king as he bossed operations on the farm.

The only thing that annoyed him was the fact that the police had once more failed to capture O'Connor and Sadler.

Where those rascals were in hiding, and how they managed to live, for Chip Sadler and his mother were under constant surveillance, was a mystery that baffled conjecture.

The inference was that they had left the neighborhood this time for certain, but Tom was by no means confident of the fact.

He suspected they were still within striking distance of him, and he never went abroad without his revolver ready for instant use.

In spite of the disgrace which hung about his father, Chip Sadler was, if anything, more impudent than ever.

He was constantly throwing out dark hints about what his father and O'Connor were going to do to Tom when they got the chance.

Tom believed that Chip knew just where the fugitives were, though he never was detected trying to communicate with them.

"I believe that young rascal meets his father

and O'Connor often in spite of the vigilance of the men I have employed to keep track of his movements," said Tom to Flynn one day. "He's about as foxy a young rooster as there is going. He has some way of throwing the watchers off his track, depend upon it. I have a great mind to send for a crack city detective and hire him to smoke out the mystery that is bothering me."

"It wouldn't be a bad idea, if you can afford it. It would probably make you feel easier in mind," replied Flynn.

Tom said he would consider the matter and the subject was dropped for the present.

On the following day the young president of the Willett Oil Company had to go to the railroad station to see about getting enough cars to ship a large consignment of oil barrels north.

After arranging the matter with the agent to his satisfaction he mounted his horse and started back for the farm.

The animal had the misfortune to cast a shoe, and Tom had to stop at a blacksmith shop on the way to have a new shoe adjusted.

While waiting for the job to be done he took a walk about the neighborhood.

It was the suburbs of the town, and there were many new houses in that vicinity, some of which were occupied by families of the working class and some still in the hands of the carpenters.

As Tom passed slowly down the street and came to the corner below the blacksmith shop he saw a boy walking down the opposite side of the cross street whom he immediately recognized as Chip Sadler.

Wondering what that youth was doing in town he stopped, pulled his hat down over his eyes and furtively watched him.

Chip, unconscious that his movements were being noted, passed on a little way and then entered the small front yard of one of the new houses.

He passed around the side of the building and disappeared.

Tom continued to watch the house and speculate as to the business that had brought Chip to that place.

While the young president of the Willett Oil Company pondered over the matter he saw Chip come out with a tin can in his hand.

He went directly to a small saloon in the neighborhood.

"He's after beer," thought Tom. "I wonder if I've spotted the rendezvous of O'Connor and Sandy Sadler? I'd give something to make sure of that fact."

He watched Chip carry the can back full of something.

The house next to that which Chip entered was a finished but unoccupied one.

There was a "To Let" sign on it.

Tom walked over to it, entered the yard and tried the front door.

It was locked, as he had expected.

He went around to the rear or kitchen door and found to his satisfaction that he could get into the house that way.

He went upstairs to a room overlooking the building whose occupants he was interested in.

The space separating the two houses was about six feet.

He got a good view of the upper room facing him.

Three men were sitting at a table playing cards, and Chip Sadler was pouring out four glasses of beer from the can, one of which he appropriated to himself.

One of the men had a smoothly shaven face, and was a stranger to Tom.

The other two wore heavy beards, but in spite of that fact their general build convinced the watcher that he was looking at Red O'Connor and Sandy Sadler.

While Tom was gazing at the men, Chip, who was facing the window, raised the beer glass to his lips.

His ferret-like eyes, peering over the edge of the glass, caught a sight of Tom at the opposite window looking in at the room.

He recognized Tom at once, and was rather startled to see him there.

"Most any body in his shoes would have been rattled and have given the alarm to his father and O'Connor."

Chip, however, with astonishing presence of mind, did nothing of the kind.

He knew that if he called the attention of the others to the presence of Tom Cobb in the next house they would show by their actions that they were aware that somebody was looking in at them, and the watcher would probably withdraw at once.

So Chip walked carelessly to the door and then called his father to come outside.

"What do you want?" asked the rascal testily, for he was interested in the game.

"Got somethin' important to tell you, dad."

"What about?"

"Tom Cobb."

The two rascals immediately looked over at Chip inquiringly.

"What about him? You ain't seen him in town, have you?"

"Yes, I have, and he ain't far away at this moment."

"Where is he?"

"Come here and I'll tell you."

"Why don't you spit it out? What are you afraid of? Bill Higgings here is one of us, and we ain't got no objection to him hearin' anythin' you got to say."

"I want you to come here, dad. It's important."

Sandy got up in a grumbling way and walked over to his son.

Chip pulled him out into the landing.

Then he told his father that Tom was in the next house watching them through the window on the second story.

Sadler uttered an imprecation, and was about to rush back into the room to tell his pal when Chip stopped him.

"Don't, dad. He'll take alarm and get away if you show that you know he's there. Call Red out and tell him, then both of you can rush in next door and nab him, see?"

Sandy saw the point and appreciated his son's suggestion.

He called O'Connor outside and told him.

While they were talking Chip strolled back into the room and took a cautious glance across at the opposite window.

"He's still there, dad. Better lose no time, for he's liable to go away after the police any minute."

Sadler and O'Connor hurriedly concocted a plan between them, and going downstairs left the cottage by the front door.

Then they entered the next yard, walked around to the kitchen door, entered the house cautiously and hid themselves under the staircase by which Tom would have to come down.

In a few minutes Tom, having made up his mind to visit the police station at once and tell what he had seen, came downstairs.

As he stepped to the entry door he was suddenly seized from behind and thrown to the floor.

CHAPTER XV.—Conclusion.

Tom had been taken by surprise, but he did his best to turn on the men and fling them off.

They had him at a great disadvantage, however, and his struggles proved ineffectual.

"Got you again, eh?" cried O'Connor exultantly. "This is a pleasure we wasn't lookin' for, but it's none the less welcome on that account."

Sadler had provided himself with some pieces of rope before they left their own house, and with these he tied Tom's hands securely behind his back.

"I don't know how you got on to us," continued Red O'Connor, "but it doesn't matter a whole lot. You won't get no chance to tell the police. If we don't fix you this time it will be because you ain't born to be killed. How you escaped the torpedo is more'n we can figure out. You did, however, so there ain't no use talkin' about it. You seem to have as many lives as a cat; but we'll settle your hash this time or know the reason why."

Tom was surprised that the men did not search him for a weapon.

They had done so the last time they nabbed him and found nothing.

This time he had a revolver in his hip pocket, but they didn't look for such a thing.

Although they did not deem it necessary to gag him, he held his peace.

He saw no use in holding any communication with the rascals.

"Well, why don't you say somethin'?" grinned Sadler.

"What's the use?" replied Tom.

"There ain't no use, I guess," replied Sandy with a twinkle of satisfaction in his eyes. "We've got you dead to rights once more, and it's my opinion your goose is cooked."

"If you kill me you'll be hanged as sure as you are alive now," said Tom.

"Oh, I don't know," replied O'Connor. "The police won't catch us any easier after we have fixed you than before."

"How are we goin' to get him into the house next door without some one seein' us, Red?" asked Sadler.

"Wait till it gets dark."

"Somebody might come in here to look at this house."

"We'll have to chance it," said O'Connor. "It won't do to take him outside in the daylight. It's too risky. The people livin' across the street might get on and suspect somethin' crooked. Go upstairs and shout across for Chip. We'll let him watch our prisoner."

Sandy went upstairs and presently Tom heard him shouting over to his son.

In a few minutes Chip appeared on the scene. He looked at Tom and chuckled.

It gave him a lot of satisfaction to see the young president of the new oil company in trouble.

"You stay here and watch Tom Cobb till it gets dark, then we'll come over and carry him around to the house," said O'Connor.

The two rascals then left.

"How do you feel?" said Chip to Tom in a jeering tone.

Tom disdained to answer him.

"Too high-toned to talk, eh?" sneered Chip. "Think you're some account since you was made president and boss of the oil company. I don't see how you ever got into such a snap, but it won't do you no good. Dad and Red'll fix you this time sure. The company'll have to get another president. Then when you're out of the way I'll make up to Jennie Dean ag'in."

"Don't you mention her name!" cried Tom angrily.

"Found you tongue, have you?" laughed Chip. "I hit you on a sore spot. You're dead stuck on Jennie. When I'm sure you're dead I'll carry the news to her just to see how she'll take it."

"If I wasn't tied up I'd give you the whipping of your life," said Tom.

"Sure of that, eh?" jeered Chip. "Well, as you're tied you can't do nothin' see? If I wanted to I could kick the stuffin' out'r you. Dad and Red wouldn't mind what I did to you."

"You're cowardly enough to do it under the circumstances."

"Yah! I'm glad you're in a hole. I hope you'll get all that's comin' to you," said Chip with a vindictive look.

He walked around the entry for a while, looking occasionally at Tom, and then he sat down on the lower stair and drummed with his feet on the floor.

Finally he took up a position in the doorway between the entry and the kitchen, where he could keep his eye on the prisoner and also look out through the kitchen window.

All this time Tom wasn't idle.

With an unconcerned face he was working his wrists behind his back in an effort to loosen his bonds so he could draw one hand out of limbo.

An hour passed slowly away, and he was satisfied he was making some progress.

Chip, confident that Tom was perfectly safe, left his post several times to go to the kitchen door to look out.

Each time he remained longer away, and Tom took full advantage of these opportunities to exert himself to the utmost.

At last, at the sacrifice of some skin, he got one hand out of the noose, and the other followed as a matter of course.

Chip was standing at the kitchen door wishing it would get dark, consequently he was not aware of what was going on in the entry.

Ten minutes elapsed, and then, shutting the door, he returned to take a look at his prisoner.

A surprise awaited him.

As he walked carelessly through the doorway he started back with a gasp of consternation.

He found Tom standing up free, and a revolver pointed at his own head.

"Come here," said Tom sternly.

Chip held back.

Tom walked up and grabbed him by the arm, pulled him forward, and then tripped him up.

As soon as he had Chip down he proceeded to bind him with the rope which had been used on himself.

The rascal started to yell, but Tom quickly caught him by the throat and squeezed his wind-pipe until he was nearly black in the face.

That scared him so that he didn't dare try it again. After binding him good and hard Tom gagged him with his own dirty handkerchief.

Then he shoved him under the stairs.

After which he shut the entry door on him and left the house, after a cautious survey of the next cottage, where O'Connor and Sadler were continuing their game of cards on the second floor.

Once on the street he ran for his horse, went to the police station, got some officers and returned to the house with them.

Tom leading, they quickly ran up to the second floor. The boy opened the door softly and walked inside.

Tom opened the door softly and walked inside.

"Hands up!" he said, covering the men with his weapon. They started up in consternation—at least O'Connor and Sadler did.

The other simply looked astonished and a bit disturbed.

"Don't move, you rascals! It is my turn now!"

As he spoke the officers walked into the room.

In two minutes O'Connor and Sadler were handcuffed together.

No attention whatever was paid to the other man.

The prisoners were marched downstairs and out to the street.

Then Tom and one policeman entered the next house and brought Chip out to join the procession which immediately took up its line of march for the station-house.

It was with a lot of satisfaction that Tom made the charge of murderous assault against the ex-well-shooters, and he charged Chip with aiding and abetting them.

As soon as they were locked up in their cells Tom started for home, feeling that at last the community was in a fair way of being rid of the two scoundrels who had made repeated attempts on his life.

Tom told Jennie and her mother at the supper table about the capture of Red O'Connor, and Sandy Sadler that afternoon, and they were delighted to hear of it.

"It took you to do the job after all," said the girl.

"If I hadn't they'd have done me," he replied.

Next morning he carried the good news to Flynn, who said he was glad to know that the rascals were safely caged at last.

A month later O'Connor and Sadler were tried and convicted of the crime they were charged with, and sent to prison for twenty years each.

Chip was tried also and sent to a house of correction until he reached twenty-one.

In the meantime the derrick well, as Tom called it, continued to flow about 700 barrels per day, and the supply was believed to be almost unlimited.

The boring of Well No. 2 was begun under the directions, and the stockholders of the

company looked forward to double results as soon as it was completed and put in operation.

The directors held their second meeting about this time and Tom went to Los Angeles to attend it.

Three months later they held their next meeting and declared a dividend of five cents a share to enable Tom to release his stock from the promoting firm which held it as security for his note of \$2,000.

After paying the money he still had \$4,255 left over to do with as he chose.

As the 39,000 shares held in the treasury was also entitled to participate in the dividend, a sinking fund was created by the money, which amounted to \$1,950.

During the next six months the flow of the derrick well increased 50 barrels a day, and at the end of the year the directors were able to declare a dividend of ten cents a share.

Tom's check amounted to \$12,510, and as he had over \$3,000 left of his first dividend he began to feel quite rich.

Three months later Well No. 2 was shot with great success, and the expectations of the stockholders were fully realized.

A third well was also under way, and the future of the Willett Oil Company looked as rosy as the Lucinda at the end of its first year.

That was a year ago, and to-day the Willett Oil Company has four wells in operation, earning a profit of \$40,000 a month for its stockholders.

Tom is now drawing a steady monthly dividend of 15 cents a share, or \$18,765, which will next year be increased to over \$25,000.

In addition to that, his salary has been raised to \$10,000 a year, so there is little danger that he ever will go to the poorhouse.

Jennie is eighteen years old and is engaged to be married to Tom.

It is understood that their wedding will take place this coming June.

There is little doubt that Tom will some day be rated as a millionaire, and he owes it all to a stroke of luck.

Next week's issue will contain "LITTLE HAL, THE BOY TRADER; or, PICKING UP MONEY IN WALL STREET."

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Charlie Cooper's Curves

or

THE STAR PLAYER OF THE UNKNOWN NINE

By Gaston Garne

(A Serial Story.)

CHAPTER V.

The Great Game With Newark Continues.

Joe was a good safe hitter, and many two-baggers had marked his previous efforts since the season began.

He knew he had to deal with a professional pitcher, but that did not frighten him in the least.

Whiz! The first ball pitched was a high one—away over his head, in fact, and the catcher let it go to the net in front of the grand-stand.

"One ball!" came from the umpire.

Charlie Cooper walked down the coach line to first.

Somehow he could not help thinking that Joe was going to hit the ball.

The next ball was a good one, but the batter missed it by a bare inch.

"One strike!"

Joe was ready for the next one; though.

It came along over the outer edge of the plate, just about the height of his chin.

Whack! The bat hit the ball fairly, and the ball went almost in a line, just too high for the second baseman to get hold of.

Joe legged it to first.

"Now then, take it easy," coached Charlie. "There is no particular hurry, Joe. Wait for a good chance."

There was such an uproar over the hit that the pitcher held the ball after it was returned to him and stood like a statue.

It was quite likely that he was not pleased at being hit for a base by the first player at the bat.

But he was a veteran player and he did not get rattled.

When he got ready to deliver the next ball he did so.

It was Harrington who was at the bat.

"Foul—strike!" called the umpire, for Harrington touched it and sent the ball over the roof of the grand-stand.

The Newark pitcher had a brand-new ball to twirl then, and he took his time about rolling it in the dirt in his box and getting ready.

He believed in worrying a batter all he could, anyhow, and being possessed of a very quick delivery, he was quite a success.

Harrington struck at the next ball and missed.

"Two strikes!"

The next was what those behind the catcher called a "beaut!" and Harrington was caught napping and was forced to retire.

The Newark rooters set up a shout at this, for at least their side was doing something.

"Hodge to the bat!"

The young captain and shortstop of the Unknowns stepped up, determined to do something.

Harry was a good hitter, and his judgment was excellent.

That was how he came to be selected as captain of the nine.

The first was a ball.

Then a strike was called on the batter, for the best of them get fooled sometimes, and Harry Hodge was no exception.

The pitcher very foolishly delivered the same sort of ball for the next.

Hodge hit it good and hard just over the third baseman's head and got to first, sending Murray to second.

"Mike Reilly up," said the scorer.

But the Irish lad knew it was his try, and he was there almost before his name was called.

Reilly was an excellent baseman, but he was a little nervous at the bat.

The pitcher got him just where he wanted him and struck him out.

There were two out now, and when Carl Schmidt stepped up it was with a determination to do or die.

The German boy was a good batter.

He was also a good waiter, and he proved it in this case.

The Newark pitcher did not want to give him a chance to hit it, evidently, for he had three balls called on him, one after the other.

"It would be better if you would let me hit it once," said Schmidt, with a grin.

Then one came that was too high for him, but he struck at it, just the same.

"One strike!" was the umpire's quick verdict.

The pitcher tried a wide curve this time, but the German refused to take the bait.

A howl went up as the bases became filled in that fashion.

The faces of the boys wore confident smiles now, for it looked like an even chance that a run would be scored.

But the fates decreed otherwise.

Dan Haypole was the next to the bat, and he cracked out a high fly at the first ball pitched.

While the boys were legging it for all they were worth the leftfielder of the home team was getting under the ball.

Down it came into his hands, just as Murray was within six feet of home plate.

"Out!" shouted the umpire.

But the Unknown boys were not disappointed. They had failed to score, but they had shown they could do something with the stick, which was more than their opponents had done so far.

No runs for either side in the first inning.

It was certainly the starting of what everybody thought would be a very interesting game.

"But wait till our boys loosen up," said one of the stanch adherents of the home team. "They will soon make that unknown crowd of country boys look sick."

Some of the fellow's own friends laughed at him.

"Don't you believe that," retorted one. "I want to see Newark win, as well as you do, but I'll tell you, they won't have an easy thing of it if they do."

As Charlie Cooper walked into the box to pitch for the second inning he was of the firm opinion that they would beat the Newarks.

He had never played ball before such a large

crowd before, but he was not the least bit disturbed.

He pitched the same kind of ball as he had done at first in this inning, and though the Newarls found the ball three times, not a hit was made.

A goose egg for the home team again.

If there ever was a happy baseball crank it was Fred Roberts.

He offered all kinds of money on the Unknown nine, but no one would take him up.

As the players were changing places for the last half of the second he got up and went over to where two ladies were sitting.

One of them was his wife and the other her sister.

The sister was not more than sixteen, but she knew all about baseball.

"Oh, Fred!" she exclaimed, "I think the pitcher of the Unknowns is just lovely!"

"Do you?" was the laughing retort. "Well, I'll introduce him to you after he wins the game."

"Well, it looks to me as though those boys are going to win," said Mrs. Roberts. "I never saw better playing in my life. Why, they all have the coolness of veterans."

"That's right, Jennie. When I struck those boys I was in the greatest baseball luck that ever came to a man. I am going to take that nine and travel as far as Buffalo with them this summer, and you and Marjorie can accompany me if you wish."

"Do you mean that, Fred?" the two ladies asked in the same breath.

"Certainly I do. But I did not know just how it would strike you to go traveling with a baseball team."

"Why, Fred, you are such a baseball enthusiast that I have caught the fever, and so has Marjorie. What could be nicer than a trip through New York State with a champion baseball team of boys?"

"Nothing!" answered her sister.

"Well, just watch the game; we'll talk about the trip later. I stand to win a thousand dollars on this game, and that young pitcher in the box is going to win it for me."

"There!" cried Marjorie, as a shout went up. "The first man has struck out."

"That's nothing!" exclaimed Roberts. "Charlie Cooper is at the bat next. He'll get to first, I'll bet a million!"

"Sh!" cautioned his wife. "Don't offer to wager now, Fred."

"All right," was the reply.

All eyes were turned upon the crack pitcher as he stepped to the plate to have a chance at the ball.

As he had struck out the pitcher of the opposing team, it was quite natural that the man should be eager to return the compliment.

But he had the toughest proposition that had ever been put to him, for Charlie always made it a point to hit the ball, whether it resulted in a base or not.

The first one was called a ball, for it was much too high.

The next was an inshoot that Charlie was forced to jump back from.

"Ball—two!" called out the umpire.

The next was a high straight one, but our hero reached it and sent it sailing over the head of the third baseman.

He reached first easily, and there was such a burst of applause and waving of hats and handkerchiefs that he was really forced to take off his cap and bow to the crowd.

Charlie Cooper had surely made himself the favorite on the Newark diamond that day.

CHAPTER VI.

A Villainous Plot.

After Fred Roberts left the crowd of sporting men on the grand-stand the black-bearded man also got up and walked away.

He went on around to where the beer and other refreshments were sold.

There was a peculiar look in his eyes as he cast a glance at the young pitcher, who was then moving toward the box.

"Strange that I should come here today," he muttered. "I never dreamed that the Unknown nine was composed of mere boys, and that Charlie Cooper was one of them. But what makes the case more strange is that this man Fred Roberts is backing the boys. Roberts is the man I came to find something about, and here he is the sponsor for Charlie Cooper, a boy I ought to fear more than any other person on the earth, unless it be Ben Spikes."

As the man got rid of these thoughts he shook his head and rubbed his chin-beard as though he was trying to find a way to do something desperate.

It was just at that minute that a tough-looking fellow was being ejected from the grounds by a couple of officers.

He had climbed over the fence, the same as some of the little boys had done, and had been caught in the act.

The instant the eyes of the black-bearded man rested upon the fellow it struck him that he was one of the sort who will do almost anything, providing they are paid for it.

Stepping forward, he touched one of the officers on the arm and asked what the trouble was.

"The guy climbed over the fence to see the game," was the reply. "He hasn't any money, and he'll get fanned with my club when he goes out through the gate."

"Well, never mind putting him out. I'll pay for him. I suppose he must be much interested in baseball, or he wouldn't have tried to get in, when he didn't have the money to pay his way. Here's half a dollar; let him go."

That altered the case at once. One of the management stepped up and took the money and the policeman let go of the fellow.

The black-bearded man nodded for the rascally-looking fellow to follow him and made his way to the rough bar, where the drinks were being disposed of.

"Have something to drink, my friend," he said; "you look as though you need it."

"I guess I do, boss!" exclaimed the man. "I ain't had a real good drink today."

"Well, you can have just what you want. I have taken an interest in you, just because you tried to get in to see the game, when you had no money."

"It's funny that you did, boss. Folks general-

ly stand ready ter help chuck a feller out when he does what I done."

"Well, I don't happen to be one of those kind. What is your name?"

"Bill Butts."

"Good! Mine is Neville. Perhaps we may be able to do some business before the game is over."

Bill Butts looked at him shrewdly. The fellow was no fool, and it was quite likely that he thought he was in the company of a villain.

He took his drink of whisky that Neville was kind enough to pay for, and then suggested that they go and look at the game.

The black-bearded man assented, so they walked along and took a standing position near the bleachers.

It was the last half of the second inning and Charlie Cooper had reached third, with two men out.

"Do you see that boy on third?" Neville whispered.

"Yes, boss," answered Bill Butts, just as though he knew what was coming next. "I reckon you don't like him, so I'll tell you that I don't, either."

"You don't like him?" queried Neville, looking at the man sharply. "Why don't you like him?"

"'Cause you don't boss. I'm a sort of mind-reader. I know you jest hate that boy, 'an' that you'd like ter git square on him for somethin'. I'm jest ther man yer want ter do it for yer."

Neville remained silent for a moment.

"I stand to lose a thousand dollars if the Unknown nine wins the game," he said in a whisper. "That boy is the pitcher, and the smartest player on the field. If something were to happen to him the game would surely be won by Newark. It is worth just five hundred dollars to me if something happens to him."

"Gee! That's a lot of money, boss! I guess I'll have to try an' earn it."

"You can keep a still tongue, I suppose?"

"I guess I kin, boss."

"Here's ten dollars to bind the bargain, then. Remember! Charlie Cooper must be hurt—if he is killed it will be all the better—so he cannot finish pitching the game for the Unknowns."

"I understand yer just as well as though 'we'd been talkin' it over for a week. So Charlie Cooper is ther boy's name, eh?"

"So I understand."

"All right. You jest go an' sit on ther grandstand an' leave it ter me. Somethin' will happen ter Charlie Cooper afore he's half an hour older, as sure as my name is Bill Butts."

It was just at that minute that Mike Reilly hit out a safe one to center, and as our hero legged it for home a yell went up that could have been heard a mile.

Charlie scored on the hit, and when Neville, his unknown enemy, realized that the Unknowns were now in the lead a muttered oath came from his lips.

He turned and walked rapidly to the grandstand, relying on the scoundrel he had hired to fix Charlie Cooper.

Meanwhile Bill Butts made for the bar the first thing.

The fact was that Neville could not have selected a man better fitted for his purpose if he had searched Newark through.

Butts was one of the worst criminals the State had ever produced.

He was as shrewd as he was villainous, but he had a failing. He would drink, and when rum was in his body shrewdness left him.

The man began filling up with whisky, no doubt wanting to make up for lost time.

With all his villainy, he liked to see a game of ball, and he was up to every point in it.

But what he did to earn the five hundred will be seen later.

Reilly went out while trying to steal second, so the Unknowns went to the field again.

But they had scored the only run so far, and they were happy and more confident than ever.

The third inning was truly a battle with pitchers.

Charlie struck three men out and not a hit was made.

The Unknowns had a man on third when the third out was made.

At the beginning of the fourth Charlie felt that he had just warmed up to his work.

Never had he had such good control of the ball before.

And Ben Handy, the catcher, was right in his element. The two worked together so nicely that some of the spectators styled it the "Invincible Battery."

The Newark players were not a little worried.

It seemed that they could already feel the sting of defeat, and to be beaten by an unknown nine of boys was not to their liking.

So far the basemen and fielders had had absolutely nothing to do in the Unknown nine.

"It is better you let 'em hit it once in a while, Charlie," said Schmidt, the left-fielder, as he walked out into the field for the fourth inning. "I would like to catch a fly already."

"Never mind about that, Carl," spoke up the young captain of the nine. "It is Charlie Cooper's curves that will win for us, if we win at all. Don't forget that."

The game proceeded.

The first man at the bat struck out, and a deafening yell went up.

The majority of the spectators were plainly with the visiting team now, which was something that was almost unheard of.

The next man up was the tall, slim fellow who liked to bunt so well.

Our hero decided to let him have a chance.

He sent in a straight one and started for home plate the moment he delivered the ball.

It was a bunt all right, but Charlie had the ball before the batter was half-way to first.

Charlie let the ball drive like a meteor for first and Joe Murrays hands received it like an expected guest that was more than welcome.

The sprinter turned and walked to the players' bench with an exclamation of disgust.

The next man up bit three times in succession at the quick outcurves Charlie let him have.

That retired the side.

But the Newarks were playing as they had never done before, and they shut out the visitors in their half of the inning.

In the fifth it was about the same. Charlie struck two men out and the third fouled out to Ben Handy.

(To be continued.)

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INTERESTING ARTICLES

LETTER IN MAIL 30 YEARS

Henry Maklia of West Fitchburg in 1896 mailed a letter to Alexander Lima, Jacobsville, Mich. He has just received the missive back. On the envelope was stamped the notation that no such person lived at that address.

LIFE OF WOODEN SHIPS

Wooden ships, notwithstanding the perils they encounter, usually outlast their builders. In the mercantile marine are a number of ships which have passed the century mark. The True Love, launched in England in 1764, is still afloat. The Two Brothers, built at Plymouth, England, in 1788, and the Good Intent, which took the water two years later, are still in actual service.

WORLD'S FASTEST WHEEL

The fastest revolving wheel in the world, according to estimates of experts, is the turbine wheel on the special supercharger of the airplane used by Lieut. John Macready in his recent attempts to better the world's altitude record. It revolves at the almost inconceivable speed of 40,000 revolutions a minute—almost 700 a second, says Popular Science Monthly. This is about twenty times the highest speed of an automobile crank-shaft.

BEARS' EVIDENCE FREES THEIR KEEPER IN COURT

The "Bear Pit of Berne" is known all over the world. Tourists from every country have gazed down into the basin of the capital of the Swiss Confederation at the bruins which have been kept there for centuries.

For the first time in the annals of law courts two bears from the Berne pit were recognized as capable witnesses. One of the assistant keepers had brought charges of cruelty against the head keeper. As a part of his defense, the head keeper, to the apprehension of the Judge and attendants, appeared for trial followed by two of the bears. The complaining witness described how the animals, even the two brought into the court room, had been badly treated.

Counsel for the head keeper asked if the Court would permit him to introduce, as the only witness for his client, the bears themselves. The Court consented, whereupon the two animals were led before the Bench. The complaining witness and several other attendants of the bear pit were asked to come down from their places and confront the bears.

To the consternation of everyone except the head keeper and his lawyer, one of the bears, showing his dislike for the attendant before him, moved menacingly toward his supposed defender in an effort to administer a savage cuff. The argument proved sufficient and the Judge dismissed the complaint against the head keeper, who, followed by the two bruins, walked out of the court room.

LAUGHS

Mrs. Scrappy—I'd like to dance over your grave, that's what I'd like to do! Scrappy—Well, you never will. I've put a clause in my will requesting my executors to have me buried at sea.

Jimmy—Ain't yer glad school's begun? Billy—Naw. Vacation suits me. Look at the fun we had playin' ball, an' fishin', an' everything. Jimmy—Yes; but just think how much more fun we'd have a-playin' hookey.

Mrs. Housewife—Bridget, that is the seventh piece of china that you have broken within the last two days. Bridget—I know it, mum. At the last place I wor-ked the folks never ate off anything but gold and silver.

"How will you have your eggs cooked?" asked the waiter. "Make any difference in the cost of them?" inquired the customer, cautiously. "No." "Then cook 'em with a nice slice of ham," said the customer, greatly relieved.

Customer—If you ever send me another piece of meat like the last, I'll take away my custom. Butcher—What's the matter with it? Customer—Why, it was so tough, that when it was cooked I couldn't get my fork even into the gravy.

"Oh!" she suddenly exclaimed, "I wish I were a man!" "What would you do?" he asked. "I'll not say what I would do, but there is one thing I will confess, that I wouldn't sit around as if I had handcuffs on when I happened to be alone with a girl."

Old Gentleman—Why are you crying, my little man? Small Boy (sobbing)—I dreamt last night dat de school burned down, and— Old Gentleman. (sympathetically)—Oh! but I don't believe that it has. Small Boy—Neither do I—I kin see de top of it right over de hill dere!

Mr. Mann—Did you see that woman just as we crossed over? Mrs. Mann—You mean the woman in the camel's hair gown and heavy beaver jacket; the one who had on bronze shoes, a hat trimmed with fuchsias and heliotrope, with pink ribbons and a chiffon veil? No, I didn't notice her in particular. What were you going to say about her?

A Clever Thief

From time to time the general public reads of some wonderful jewel robbery, and marvels at the sagacity of those thieves who prefer to turn their talents, often of the highest order, to a dishonest account, when they might make a profitable and honorable livelihood. But there have been one or two audacious robberies which have never found their way into the newspapers, from some cause or another best known to the losers. Some days ago we had the pleasure of meeting one of the partners in a wholesale jewelry business, dealing principally with the better class of West End shops, though they are always ready to accept a private customer. In course of time conversation turned upon jewelry robberies, and for something over an hour the new acquaintance kept us interested while he detailed more than one audacious plot by which the firm suffered loss. After the silence which followed a tale of more than usual interest, one of the circle asked the narrator if ever private customers were tempted to rob him. The answer was the following story:

Perhaps the greatest loss we ever had was, in a measure, due to one of the best customers of the firm, a member of the Upper House, with a town residence in Arlington street, and no one knows how many seats and estates in different parts of the country. His daughter was to be married.

I was in the counting house one morning some two months before the marriage came off, discussing it with my partner, both wondering if we should have an order from the earl, when a slim-looking gentleman came in and laid a note upon the table. It was an order from the earl to repair at once to Arlington street with a parure of diamonds, of which we make a specialty. I arranged to call a little later in the day, a fact of which I informed the slim gentleman. But toward the afternoon I received another note by the same hand, advising me that his lordship had left town suddenly for M—— Castle, his seat in Loamshire, and that I was to come down there for instructions in the course of the following day. I remember being somewhat annoyed at the time, for I had an important engagement on the morrow, but I had to swallow my impatience and inform the messenger that I would do myself the honor of obeying his lordship's commands. My partner was in the inner office, and it was my duty to show him the letter. Judge of my surprise when I could find neither of the earl's notes, though I distinctly remember placing the second one upon the desk before me while I was giving the messenger my reply. I thought little of it at the time, though how their loss affected me afterward you shall hear.

I went down to M—— the following day with more valuables than I have ever carried before or since. I must have had at least thirty thousand pounds' worth about me altogether. I knew the earl very well by sight, though I had never had a personal interview with him before. I had occasionally seen him in the counting-house, and had listened to his peculiarly grating voice—a deep, stern voice, with a rough rasp in it like the noise of a saw—a voice I could pick out among a thousand. I had no occasion to find fault with

my reception; an elegant luncheon awaited me in the dining-room, and his lordship's own man—the slim gentleman aforesaid—was told to administer to my creature comfort. He was extremely chatty and agreeable, without being the least forward as “gentlemen's gentlemen” too often are; and asked a variety of questions about my business, commiserating me upon the anxiety I must suffer in traveling the country with so vast and tempting treasures in my possession.

I will not detain you with the result of my interview with the earl and his daughter. I was fortunate enough to have in my possession the precise ornaments they required; and as I returned to town that night, well pleased with my journey and the big check in my pocket, I congratulated myself that my treasures were so considerably lightened since the morning. It was more than twelve months before I heard from the earl again.

It was one dull November morning, with a fog beginning to settle over the city so dense that he had lighted the gas, though it was not long past eleven, when a visitor was ushered into the counting-house—no one else than the slim gentleman, who gave a smiling recognition and held out a note for my persual. I was somewhat astonished and not a little pleased when I saw that it was an order from his lordship for a parure of diamonds; in fact, almost the same order as I had received nearly eighteen months before. I pointed out this resemblance to the slim gentleman in a jocular way. To my surprise, his face became grave, and he looked around cautiously, as if afraid of eavesdroppers, and coming a little closer, began in a significant tone:

“Of course, you understand, sir, that confidential servants are often obliged to know things that it is well other people should be ignorant of. Every noble family has its skeleton, and our family has theirs. Now, in the first place, have you another set of diamonds the counterpart of the others my lord purchased?”

I intimated that we had such another set, as the earl must remember, but my visitor waived the question aside impatiently.

“You might possibly have sold it,” he said, “and there is no time to make another. The fact is, Lady R——, who is staying with us now, must wear those jewels at a dance we are giving to-morrow. And that is where the difficulty comes in, for they have been stolen!”

“Good gracious, you don't say! But why make a mystery of the matter?”

“Because we happen to know who the thief is!” said the valet, dropping his voice still lower. “To a great extent, I was instrumental in detecting the delinquent myself. It is a deplorable affair, a shocking affair—such a promising young gentleman, too. Mr. ——, we must have those jewels at any price. If not, one of the highest families in the land will be terribly compromised. Do not be at Arlington street later than half-past two.”

The drawing-room blinds were down; the shutters, too, all over the house, with the exception of the dining-room. In the clearer atmosphere it was fairly light, light enough to do without gas. In the front dining-room a young man was stand-

ing before the fire, who pleasantly introduced himself to me as the Hon. Claude V——, a name I knew well enough, though I had never seen the young gentleman before. In spite of his naturally amiable manner, I thought he seemed anxious, and ill at ease, frequently breaking off in the middle of some conversation to listen to the sound of voices which came plainly enough from behind the thin, ornamental partition dividing the two rooms, and whence the earl's peculiar grating voice could be heard every now and then raised in something like anger. I could catch from time to time allusions to diamonds, and occasionally the word "thief" was used in words of immeasurable contempt. In the middle of this the door opened and the gentlemanly valet walked in. Even he seemed somewhat restless and uneasy, a circumstance I should scarcely have expected from a person of his unusually even temperament. He held in his hand an open telegram and a letter for me, the ink was still wet upon the envelope. I tore it open and read that his lordship had suddenly been summoned to M—— Castle, the valet at the same time showing me the telegram signed "Mary."

"You will have to go down to M—— to-morrow, sir," he said to me, "unless, perhaps, you have no objection to allowing the earl to take the jewels with him. However, for the present that matters but little."

I immediately expressed my willingness to comply with this arrangement. With seeming reluctance, the valet took my bag and presently I heard the sound of conversation in the adjoining apartment.

"Thank goodness, there is a way out of it!" I hear the earl say. "No, I will not look at anything else now. Take the bag back to Mr. —— at once. And, Evans, I must have a cab immediately."

"You are usually cautious in your profession," remarked the Hon. Claude to me, as I made a hurried inventory of the various costly nicknacks I had brought with me on the chance of a sale, for even confidential servants are not always to be trusted. "Nothing missing, I trust?"

There was nothing missing, as I smilingly hastened to reply, though my answer was drowned by the rattle of a cab on the pavement outside. I heard the earl's voice in the hall admonishing the faithful Evans, and caught a glimpse of his well-known figure as he climbed into the cab. As the horse sped rapidly away, my companion heaved an voluntary sigh of relief.

"Of course, you have guessed there is something wrong, Mr. ——," he said, gravely. "I am not at liberty to favor you with any details, but you will be doing us all a favor by observing a discreet silence concerning everything that you may have heard the last half hour."

Needless to say I promised, also, that I fully intended to adhere to that resolution. I stayed chatting with my aristocratic acquaintance for some time, considerably taken by his pleasant chatter and keen observation of men and things. Judge my surprise when, on looking at my watch, I found it to be past four. I had already missed one appointment by my carelessness, and I excused myself hurriedly, and half an hour later I was back again at our counting-house in Hatton Garden. As I drove up another cab stopped at

the door, and out of it descended a figure which filled me with astonishment. It was the Earl of —— himself. He seized me hurriedly by the arm, contrary to his usual dignified manner and bearing, and almost forced me into the office. Once there, he lost no time in telling me the occasion for his errand, a narrative, which as it proceeded, more than confirmed my worst fears.

"I thought it best not to telegraph you," he commenced; "electric messages get into suspicious hands occasionally, so I came up from M—— straight here."

"You have only just arrived in town, my lord?" I asked feebly. "Do I understand that?"

"I reached Paddington scarcely half an hour ago. The fact is, that the jewels I had from you for my daughter have been stolen."

As coherently as I could I told my tale and fortunately was able to produce the two notes in evidence of my sanity, which up to this time had been open to argument.

"I am afraid, very much afraid, that you've been the victim of a cleverly planned robbery. Yesterday morning Evans came to me and asked for two days' holiday, a favor which I need not tell you was readily granted. It was only last night that my daughter, who is staying at M——, with her husband, discovered that she had been robbed. Of course, none of us suspected Evans. I should not have suspected him now if I had not seen you, and my object in coming here was to get a technical description of the missing jewels for the use of the Scotland Yard people. What a pity I did not come earlier!"

By this time I was in a frame of mind suspicious enough to make me suspect any one, including the earl himself.

"I have a good memory, Mr. ——," said my visitor, kindly, "and I recognize these letters as the two I wrote you prior to my daughter's marriage. Evan's, I understand, delivered both of them, and must have stolen them while your back was turned, with a view to this very robbery. It is true that I have a son, Claude, only, unfortunately for your theory, he is at present with his regiment in the West Indies."

"But I could have sworn to your lordship's figure as I saw you getting into the cab; and, pardon me, I could make oath to your voice among a million."

"You recall a little circumstance I had quite forgotten," the earl replied, in amused retrospection. "Evans, I regret to say, was uncommonly clever at mimicry; indeed, on one occasion I am informed that he presumed to counterfeit my dress and general style, even to my voice, for the amusement of a select circle of friends, in a manner which filled them with astonishment."

We drove to Scotland yard together and laid our complaint before the authorities. They were very wise and confident; but, as I imagined, the real culprit was never captured. The "Hon. Claude" was picked up some few months later, but he turned out to be only a catspaw in the hands of the older and abler scoundrel. But the astute Evans, the successful mimic, was never found, and those two splendid parures remain lost to the world to this day. But in consequence of the daring robbery being committed under his own roof, the Earl of —— insisted upon making good our loss.

CURRENT NEWS

"SILENT DEATH" GUN TESTED BY GERMAN POLICE

A new gun that deals out silent death through compressed air is being tried out before representatives of the German army and police. The gun can shoot twenty-five bullets before reloading is necessary. The ordinary infantry gun holds six bullets.

The bullets projected by compressed air pierce armor plate at a distance of 5,000 feet. The whistle of the flying bullets is the only noise the gun makes. The inventor is positive that big cannon can be constructed on the same principle.

WOOD FOR AUTO FUEL

A motor truck that uses waste wood as fuel was exhibited recently at a meeting of the French Association for the Advancement of Science. Gas was generated on board the motor from small blocks of wood and was used in an engine that can also run on liquid fuel if it is necessary. The vehicle is thus its own gas plant. Its manufacturers claim that it runs fifty miles on a quarter's worth of fuel.

FIRST AIRPLANE SLEEPER LEAVES BERLIN FOR LONDON

The first European "flying sleeper" left Berlin for London recently. It is a new type of Albatros airplane, equipped with two motors of 260 horsepower each and with eight leather passenger chairs which, by a simple mechanism, can be transformed into four regular berths of standard sleeping-car size.

Two officials of the German Air Trust and the Albatros Airplane Company and two Americans reclined on these couches.

Light meals and drinks are ultimately served en route by a cabin boy. It is intended to use the aerial sleeper for night flights.

VOLCANO DESTROYS ISLAND IN BIG DISPLAY AT SESQUI

An entire island is seen destroyed by a volcano and sunk in the sea in a masterpiece of stagecraft produced by J. Saunders Gordon in the pyrotechnic display, "Hawaiian Nights," at the Sesqui-Centennial International Exposition, now being held in Philadelphia. The spectacle is staged daily on the Gladway.

More than 300 persons, including ballet girls and Hawaiian warriors take part in the thrilling episodes leading up to the destruction of the island by the volcano, Mauna Loa. Native rites and ceremonies and the reproduction of a mardi gras are features of the production. The arena in which the show is staged seats 10,000 persons.

NEW ATOM THEORY

Particles even smaller than the electrons, hitherto supposed to be the smallest things in the world, may surround the parts of which atoms are built up, according to a suggestion made by Sir Joseph Thomson in his recent Kelvin lecture before the Institution of Electrical Engineers.

According to modern notions an atom consists of a central, rather massive, nucleus charged

with positive electricity called a proton, surrounded at relatively great distances by ultra-minute particles of negative electricity called electrons, which rotate in different orbits around the nucleus.

The new theory assumes that both the proton and its satellite electrons are surrounded by an atmosphere of much smaller particles, the impact of which on the protons and electrons causes them to vibrate and send out energy. "Both proton and electron must be regarded as nebular systems," Sir Joseph stated.

Theory indicates that the vibrations or oscillatory movements of protons and electrons should give rise to electrical waves, and Sir Joseph believes that such waves are actually produced, although ordinarily they are unable to escape from the outer confines of the atom, being reflected back into the interior. The so-called "quanta" of light he believes to consist of bundles of electrical waves shot out from the atom at the same time as ordinary electro-magnetic waves.

SEVEN AGES OF MAN TAKE NO TOLL OF THIS TIMEPIECE

If yours is a Lifetime watch, you are insured against breakage, rust, decay, fire, shipwreck, baby's whims, tornadoes, violence, and wear and tear. After ten years' success with the Lifetime watch, Macy's department store, New York City, reaffirms its guaranty against every possible accident, save actual loss or theft.

Lifetime watches, all government tested, are obtainable only at Macy's, and the name is a registered trade mark. Newly selected models have just arrived.

If casualty of any nature whatsoever utterly ruins this perennial timepiece—whether it be a storm or a riot, an earthquake or a plunge out the thirtieth-story window—save the pieces! Bring them to Macy's, and if the expert watchmakers there cannot put them together again, you will be presented with a new Lifetime watch, with everything intact including the same old guaranty.

If the watch for any reason is in need of repairs, such reparation will be made free of charge. If it needs a thorough cleaning it will get it, and you will have it back as good as new. If you drop it into the sea, fish it out, take it back where you got it, and it will be rejuvenated or replaced. If it stops a bullet, thank heaven and take what's left to Macy's.

You simply cannot lose time with a Lifetime watch, unless it is stolen or vanishes beyond any retrieving. You cannot even lose money. Yet this marvel may be had in the Jewelry Department on the street floor at Macy's for ninety-eight dollars and fifty cents, while the Presentation model, with extra embellishments, costs a hundred and fourteen.

The Lifetime watch is made in America in a sturdy reliable style, enclosing a twenty-three jewel movement adjusted to six positions within a case of fourteen-karat green or white gold.

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Useful, Instructive, and Amusing. They contain Valuable Information on Almost Every Subject.

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